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Finding a Panacea for Stress

Move from Distress to De-stress

Shiv Dhawan Ph.D

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Shiv Dhawan Ph.D.

Finding a Panacea for Stress – Move from Distress to De-stress

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Finding a Panacea for Stress – Move from Distress to De-stress
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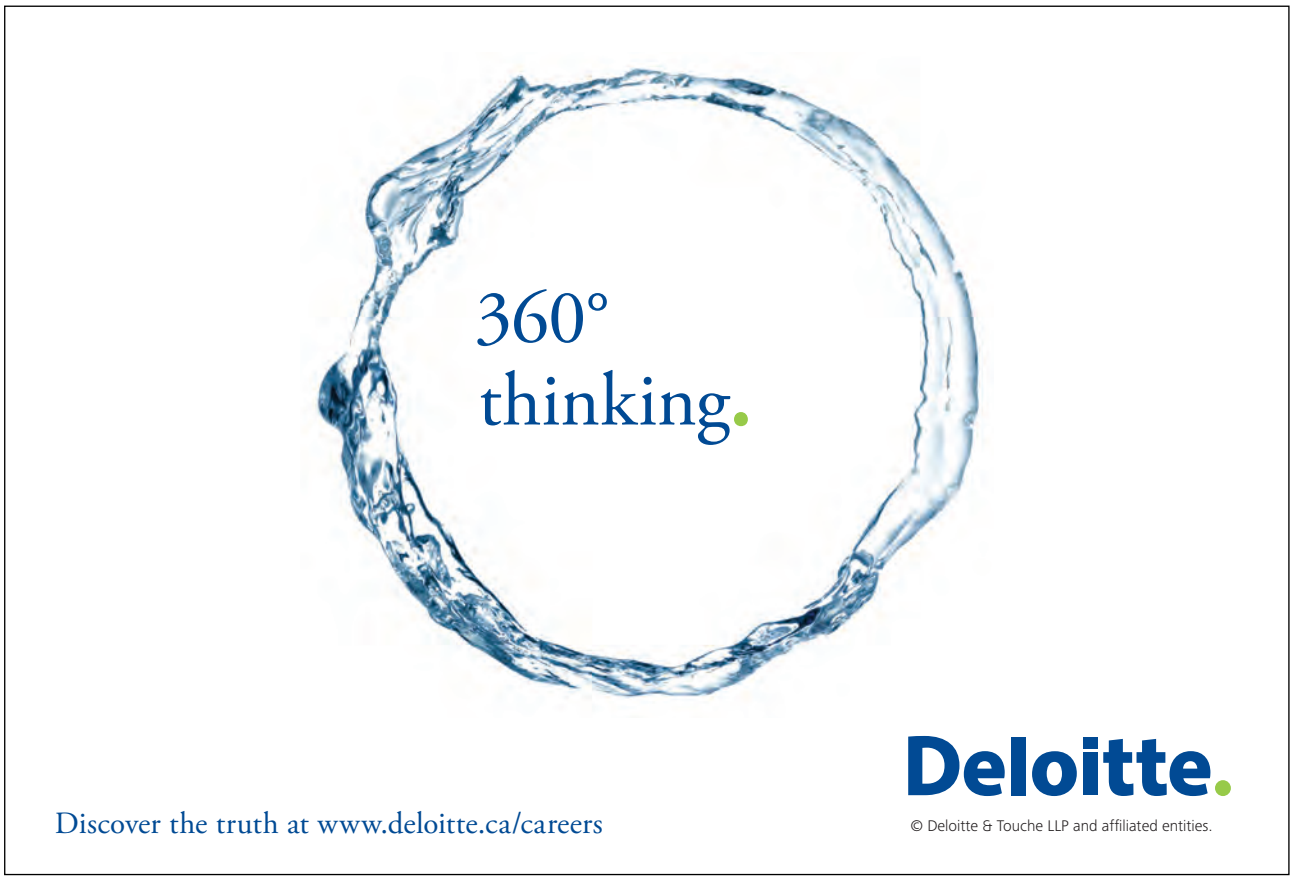

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Dedication

Dedicated to my family, father late Jagdish Dhawan a manager par excellence,
my mother Gajinder Dhawan, my wife Sareena and my two children Madhav and Chandni

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Preface

I first decided to write a book on stress sometime in December 1999. Professionally I was going through a rough patch and in order to save my job had to accept to be banished for two years to the wilderness of the foothills of the Himalayas. I reached the small sleepy town of Haldwani at dusk driving a ramshackle Suzuki 800 from New Delhi. I was euphemistically supposed to be Programme Director of a training institute that was providing in-service training to forest guards.

For those of the readers who are unfamiliar with the geography of India let me explain my predicament. I was a denizen of New Delhi, the capital of India. Lived in the toniest part of the city and was the life of many a cocktail circuit. Suddenly I found myself 250 kilometers away from all the city lights in a one horse town and living in the midst of dense forests. Till the previous weekend I was toasting models and beauty queens and now for the next two years my companions were scorpions, spiders, a twenty foot king cobra, the occasional Himalayan black bear and ferocious leopards that wandered in and out of my backyard as if they owned it. Electricity was a luxury and 18 to 20 hours a day we lived off a diesel powered generator. My detractors were certain I would die of stress brought on by loneliness and inability to cope. I too had a similar view of my fate.

Surprisingly as the days unfolded, I swiftly got into kilter, made friends with almost the entire city. Soon my forested cottage became the hub of social life with raucous song and dance and barbeques every weekend. The challenge of infusing life into a cadre of demotivated foresters took up much of my day time. One of my tasks was counseling these people on handling job related stress.

While researching for this I got considerable time to ponder over my own condition. Strangely, I was not missing the strobe lit life I had led for thirty eight years. I realized that it was my outlook and attitude that had turned a bad situation into an enjoyable one. I designed and delivered several training courses on stress management and realized it was all in the mind. I decided that someday, if I got the opportunity I would compile my thoughts and experiences in the form of a book on stress and its panacea.

Thereafter, over the years life was both kind and unkind by turns and I and my colleagues stumbled several times. Our group was humorously called the four musketeers. One musketeer succumbed to a massive heart attack which was stress induced, another committed suicide exactly one day before his 42nd birthday – as he hung himself with a nylon cord his iPod was blaring the Jethro Tull number "Too old to rock, too young to die". That left two of us. It set me wondering why we did not curl up and die. Maybe we had discovered the panacea to stress. It was a matter of reorientation of attitude and life style change. I therefore felt drawn to share my experiences in the hope that it might help and encourage other people to deal with the stressful situations they might be experiencing.

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This book is different from the current body of knowledge in the stress management domain insofar as it does not regard stress as a disease. Rather stress is a behavioral or attitudinal misalignment with external situations and events. The external world is neutral – it is a collection of different personalities and events that an individual relates to during different stages and facets of life. It starts out by indicating that stress is something within our control – it is our reaction to external stimuli. It thus is a matter of attitude and personality.

Stressors are everywhere each and every day and will always remain so. These situations will never entirely go away but will confront us from time to time.

Common and well known stressors are things like job pressures, driving in traffic, family arguments, financial pressures, never having enough time to do things that one desires. Sometimes seemingly positive experiences like marriage and job promotion could be stress provoking events. The internet, email and mobile technology along with global roles have given birth to an instant gratification society. It is impossible not to be drawn into it. We need to have a balanced perspective so as to be able to deal with whatever life throws at us.

The book thus illustrates the ways and methods to overcome stress, by understanding its causes, its working and also lifestyle changes that need to be made in order to acquire the appropriate personality traits that enable us to face various situations without becoming dysfunctional or out of sync.

This book helps individuals to prepare and bolster their stress fighting abilities by sharing the elements of a stress management programme. It demonstrates how stress and its effects can be drastically reduced or even eliminated through various lifestyle changes, relaxation and meditation therapies exercise as well as sleep techniques

Basically, we may not be able to change the situations we are facing, but we can certainly change the way we approach and manage them. That is where this book provides insights into practical and virtually free solutions and attitudinal changes and exercises which can be carried out as part of life-as-usual, and improve physical and mental health, thereby making the individual more productive and peaceful. Such an individual would be a genuine asset to any organization and the contributing member of any family or social and community group.

Shiv Dhawan
New Delhi
6th May 2013

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Prologue

Who Will Cry for You?

It must have been 3 a.m. in the morning when my blackberry rang out in a James Brown "I Feel Good" tone. It was my old pal Ajay's wife sobbing that Ajay had gone on a business trip to Mumbai and died in his sleep in a hotel room. The cause of death was a massive heart attack. Ajay was just 45 years old.

Ever since I received that dreadful phone call, I have been introspecting, giving the old lifestyle models a cold hard look. I was trying to rediscover myself and restore the work-life balance and find a way to de-stress.

Ajay used to take his official persona and designation so seriously that it became difficult to separate man from his visiting card. Taking time off for a vacation looked to him like a divorce. His last vacation was five years ago. For the last five years he also worked Saturday, Sunday or both days on the weekend. It was a tough decision for him to take off personal time when he believed many other people looked up to him for guidance. He just had to be always available for his team with advice or a sympathetic ear.

He was universally feted as a jolly good fellow-everyone's big brother. Then there was something horribly out of kilter with his funeral. For a busy man of the world and a universal do-gooder there were hardly eight or ten moaners of which three persons were his distraught wife and two teenage daughters. Most of his own family did not attend. Beneficiaries of his largesse from his office were conspicuous by the absence. He who forgot himself for the sake of others was being cremated all alone!!

This situation raised several painful questions. Most of us believe our own lies and try to live to as cardboard cutout of ourselves. We need to show we are hard boiled professionals and so cram in as little leisure activities as possible – our increased workload is threatening to squeeze out our lives. We are reluctant to sleep because it's morning in some other part of the world, and we have to cater to different geographies and mark time on jobs that so many of us find so much less rewarding than they once seemed.

It's as if we are racing through the tunnels of our lives, never stopping to actually live. How often do we look up to realize a day, a month, a year – a decade! – has zipped by, and we were too busy to notice? We seldom get out to enjoy nature, which we can't find any way for all the buildings, cars, and concrete. Our immune systems are compromised, our stomachs churn, our hearts are damaged, our arteries are clogged, and our backs and necks scream in an agony of tension.

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We would notice how awful we feel and how little fun we're having, except that we don't really have the time or energy to notice much of anything. The epidemic of stress-related illnesses is treated with antidepressants, so that sufferers will remain functional enough to go to work and to keep up with the incessant demands that we mistake for life.

Anyone who isn't always on the go, cramming as much as possible into the hours of a day, is regarded as lazy and unmotivated. Our corporate hero is the multi-tasking dynamo, the go-getter. Laptops, cell phones and Wi-Fi and Wi-Max buildings make it possible to stay in touch with the workplace no matter where we are, it has come to be expected that we will stay in touch, be always on call, or carry our work home with us to do in the taxi, on the plane, in the toilet, or at the dining table weekend after weekend, night after night. Anyone who dares to draw the line and say no to working during their "free time," or even while on vacation, is made aware that there are plenty of people who could use that job.

The answer to all our pains lies in visualizing our terminal hour. If we knew were going to die in six months, would we be doing most of the things we are doing now? What would we be doing? Those things we would choose to do if our time were limited are the things that mean the most to us. Those things that we would abandon are probably of little value in our life. If there is not a significant degree of overlap between those two lists, then we are probably having a fairly crummy life.

And by the way, this isn't just some loser's angst. From the moment we were born, we are dying, and our time is limited. Six months, sixty years. It doesn't matter how much time we have left, it won't be enough – and it will disappear all the faster if we don't stop racing through it. We need to live each moment. We need to learn how to move from distress to de-stress. As John Lennon said, "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans!"

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1 Understanding Stress

1.1 What Is Stress

A very pedestrian definition of stress goes something like this "Stress is feeling bad due to troubles beyond our control." This includes the only two ideas about stress that are almost universal, that stress is unpleasant and that it is something that happens to us and which we can do little about. I want you to forget about these or any other preconceived ideas you may have about stress before we go any further, because they will only confuse you.

At this stage let us look at some examples of stress in action to see if there are any common features that will help us to find a satisfactory definition. All of them are described from real life, and it may help if we consider how we would feel if put through the same experiences.

A young man joins the army. He is sent out to Iraq and sees action in the war against Saddam Hussein. His job is to transfer ammunition from the trucks to the guns. The part of the battleground where he works is open to the sky and explosives surround him. Terrorists try and weave their way through the barrage of anti-aircraft fire, as human bombs on their suicide missions. The young man sees this and is reminded over and over again what will happen if he is shot. He cannot do anything to prevent it, and relies entirely on the accuracy of his fellow gunners. After six months of nerve-racking action he goes to pieces. He rarely sleeps but when he does he has nightmares and he wakes, sweating and terrified. He cannot concentrate and becomes inefficient at his job. He feels weak and has a series of symptoms, headaches, nausea, lack of appetite, loss of weight, nervous twitching and blurring of vision. He is seen by a medical officer and sent home.

Compare this stressful experience with one in another young man. He comes from a staid family who lays great emphasis on accuracy, reliability and security. The young man has no idea what to do when he graduates from university but is persuaded by his parents to become a bureaucrat as this job requires all the qualities they hold most dear. In the absence of any alternative he reluctantly agrees and takes up a job as an assistant in a tax office, a job that has excellent prospects and is secure till retirement age. At first he works as a ledger clerk checking figures. The others in his office are older than him, but they are polite, well-spoken and helpful. He does his job well and is promoted to senior ledger clerk, now checking the figures of more important financial transactions. He continues to work with kind and considerate colleagues and his parents congratulate themselves on setting him forth on a worthwhile career. But after six months he is utterly bored with the apparent triviality of his job. He feels tyrannized by rows of meaningless figures and irritated because they all have to balance on his ledger sheets. He gets curious impulses to upset the balance and falsify the figures, impulses to which he eventually succumbs. He sees his superior, hoping to be sacked, but instead is promoted. The pattern of boring repetitive work among sympathetic, stolid people continues. At last he can stand it on longer. He gives up his job and joins the army, and his parents are predictably horrified.

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Finally, let us look at the case of a long-distance lorry driver who likes his job. It offers him variety and a degree of independence that he would not find elsewhere. True, at times he feels angry with other drivers on the road who seem not to appreciate the difficulties of driving a ten-ton lorry, but usually he enjoys sitting high above the road with so much throbbing power beneath him. He often prefers to drive for many hours at a stretch, although this means irregular meals and he knows it is frowned upon by the company. After several years of continual long-distance driving he starts to get pains in his stomach. They often wake him at night and trouble him during long drives. He finds milk drinks helpful and often takes them when he has the pain. But the pain gradually gets worse and he goes to see his doctor, who arranges for tests and referral to a specialist in hospital. The tests show that he has a duodenal ulcer. He discusses his future with the specialist and his own doctor and is advised to change his job as long-distance lorry driving is thought to be too stressful for him.

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All three men have problems caused by stress but it is very difficult to find a common pattern in them. Most of us will sympathize strongly with the first man as he has been through a highly unpleasant experience, which he has lost all power to control. Although most of us can tolerate the same degree of danger for short periods it becomes more difficult the longer it goes on, and sooner or later we all crack up. The second man will be more puzzling. Those of us who have tidy, methodical minds and prefer an organized routine in life will find it hard to understand why the young man should have reacted so strangely. Those who like more excitement in their lives and would not contemplate a career as bureaucrats will understand his reaction only too well and may be surprised he lasted as long as six months in the job. Our third man will also provoke different feelings. Those of us who have never had serious indigestion or stomach pains will see him as a man with a satisfying job who just happens to develop a duodenal ulcer. Of course we may have read somewhere that duodenal ulcers are caused by stress but this will mean little to us unless we too have had indigestion when under stress. Then we would appreciate his symptoms only too well and probably have relieved them in similar ways.

The only common feature is conflict. This is shown mentally in the first two men and physically in the third. For some reason they and their surroundings do not mix properly and they cannot adapt in a healthy way. Beyond that they disagree. Many regard stress as something which puts us under increased pressure and forces us to act and think more quickly or intensely than we would like. But our man in his quiet office leisurely looking at figures is not under this kind of pressure. It is probably less than he would like. He finds it stressful because part of him shouts stridently through the conventional façade. 'Get me out of here, this isn't me!' This brings up one of the most important points about stress. Stress is not defined by what causes it but by a person's reaction to the cause, technically called the stressor. Those of us who cannot tolerate the bureaucracy and have duodenal ulcers would probably find all three of the situations I described as stressful. By contrast, a healthy tax collector who likes his job and enjoys parachute jumping in his spare time (such people do exist) would find none of them stressful, although even he would find it difficult to remain settled on the battleground at war. This is why predicting stress is such a problem. It is easy to look back on an experience, knowing it has done harm, and to say it was the stress of X or Y that caused it. It is quite another matter to predict in advance that someone will be harmed by going through a particular experience. We may be right, but man has incredible powers of adaptation to the most unfavorable of settings.

A common fallacy about stress is that it is basically a nervous reaction. Our third example would not be included if this were true, because the first sign of stress that he experienced was the pain of his duodenal ulcer. Now if we had the key to his mind and could recall everything that he had been through over the years we would find that all was not as well he made out, and his life-style was a stressful one. But the mind has a great ability to cast unwelcome feelings aside if they disagree with others that are strongly held. Our lorry driver could not be accused of dishonesty when he said he liked his job and found it satisfying. He was giving the truth according to his lights and showed no features suggesting a nervous reaction. But the mind and body are closely intertwined and stress can show itself in the body's reactions without the conscious mind being aware.

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The best definition of stress I can give is that it is the reaction of *the mind and body to change*. This covers all the examples of stress that we have described and a great deal more. You will find other definitions of stress elsewhere and I do not pretend this is the only correct one. My definition is very broad and takes in a large range of reactions that many people do not find unpleasant even though they involve a great deal of change. The key issue is whether we adapt to the change when it takes place. If we do, the stress is hardly noticed; if we do not, the stress becomes distress. It persists and eventually breaks down mental and physical health. The definition includes all kinds of change, pleasant, unpleasant, exciting and boring. The stress of winning a fortune in the casino can lead to distress in time if we do not adjust to it, and adjustment is often not as easy as we might think. If we do not adapt to the initial change, distress will go on continuously in the absence of further variation, but change always sets off the process. People react differently to change because they have different personalities and different ways of coping. Some situations are so unpleasant that the initial stress always moves onto distress. The situation of the young man in the army described earlier is so threatening that very few people could adapt to it completely, but that of working in a tax office involves only a slight change from normal in most people. Only a small number would find they couldn't adapt to this and so become distressed. So when we say that something or other is stressful we really mean that the change it produces is large and most people would find difficulty in adjusting to it. We cannot say that all people without exception would become distressed. At the other end of the scale are changes which appear so small that we cannot see any possible problems in adapting, but they will appear much bigger changes to some people, and they cannot adjust easily. Each personality is different and we all heave sorts of problems.

We cannot alter people's basic personalities and so in living with stress we try and adjust as well as possible to all the changes going on about us. Many of these adjustments take place without our knowing much about them but some bother us continually. The latter are the ones that makes us feel 'under stress', force us to seek advice or take other forms of action to remove them. If we could always adjust to stress we should never become distressed. What makes some suffer from stress and others take it in their stride? Before answering this we need to know what goes on in our minds and bodies when we are under stress, and to decide when the stress is helpful and when it is harmful.

1.2 Is All Stress Bad

Hans Selye was one of the founding fathers of stress research. His view was that "stress is not necessarily something bad – it all depends on how you take it. The stress of exhilarating, creative successful work is beneficial, while that of failure, humiliation or infection is detrimental." Selye believed that the biochemical effects of stress would be experienced irrespective of whether the situation was positive or negative.

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The most commonly accepted definition of stress (mainly attributed to Richard S. Lazarus) is that stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that "demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize." In short, it's what we feel when we think we've lost control of events.

Karl Albrecht in his book "Stress and the Manager" described four common types of stress as:

- Time stress.
- Anticipatory stress.
- Situational stress.
- Encounter stress.

Time Stress is when an individual worries about time, or the lack thereof. People worry about the number of things that they have to do, and fear that they'll fail to achieve something important. They might feel trapped, unhappy, or even hopeless or exhausted, or feel that they worked a full day yet accomplished nothing meaningful. Common examples of time stress include worrying about deadlines or rushing to avoid being late for a meeting.

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Anticipatory stress describes stress that people experience concerning the future. Sometimes this stress can be focused on a specific event, such as an upcoming presentation that has to be made or a review meeting with a reporting officer. Sometimes anticipatory stress can also be vague and undefined, such as an overall sense of dread about the future, or a worry that "something will go wrong."

Situational Stress arises when people are in a scary situation that they have no control over. This could be an emergency. More commonly, however, it's a situation that involves conflict, or a loss of status or acceptance in the eyes of your group. For instance, getting laid off or making a major mistake in front of your team are examples of events that can cause situational stress. Situational stress often appears suddenly, for example, you might get caught in a situation that you completely failed to anticipate. For example, imagine that the PowerPoint presentation you are going to make and the laptop refuses to boot on. You try fiddling around with it but to no avail. Your automatic response is to feel a surge of anxiety. Your stomach knots and feels bloated. You withdraw into yourself and, if someone asks what the problem is, you have a difficult time knowing what to say. You now move into anticipatory stress trying to visualize the repercussions of this event when a post mortem of the situation is carried out.

Encounter stress revolves around people. You experience encounter stress when you worry about interacting with a certain person or group of people – you may not like them, or you might think that they're unpredictable. Encounter stress can also occur if your role involves a lot of personal interactions with customers or clients, especially if those groups are in distress. For instance, physicians and social workers have high rates of encounter stress, because the people they work with routinely don't feel well, or are deeply upset.

1.3 Living With Stress

Stress is not necessarily a bad thing. For a violinist to make music, the strings on his instrument must be taut – but only to a degree. If they are too tight, they will snap. But if the strings are too loose, they will produce no sound at all. The appropriate tension lies somewhere between the two extremes. It is similar with stress. Too much can be harmful, But what about no stress at all? While the prospect might sound inviting, the fact is that you need stress – at least to a degree.

Stress can have positive as well as negative effects. Everyone needs at least a little excitement. People become bored when the level of stress is extremely low, and some will actively seek out stressful situations such as riding a roller coaster, watching horror films, skiing or mountaineering. Others take their need for excitement to greater lengths, and pursue careers as test plots, racing drivers or steeplechase jockeys. These activities may seem stimulating and challenging to the people who engage in them, but others may avoid them as simply too dangerous or frightening. The kinds of jobs people hold, and the leisure activities they choose, reflect important individual differences in how stressors are seen by different people.

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What we need to therefore focus upon is different ways of treating harmful stress. Harmful stress, which includes distress and strain, has no advantages and should be kept to a minimum, if not eliminated altogether. Here I want you to come with me on a voyage of discovery. As I have mentioned, stress is something very personal. It is an individual's reaction to stimuli. It is impossible to say that any one way of coping with stress is better than any other because not only do the causes differ, but also the people who show the effects of stress.

Coping with stress and anxiety is an every-day requirement for normal human growth and development. Going to office, or into a new job, for the first time, being separated from parents or loved ones, doubting one's own adequacy in relations with other people, job pressures and deadlines, speaking or entertaining in public are among the many potential sources of stress.

Stress is an integral part of the natural fabric of life. Any situation in which a person's behavior is evaluated by others can be stressful.

When it comes to distinguishing between mental stress and the normal ups and downs of life we are on difficult territory. In the last resort each individual has to decide the dividing line for himself. Some people can be under stress even though everything in their lives is satisfactory, at least in a material way. They have jobs which are interesting and in which they can go at their own pace, they are happily married with delightful children and are physically fit. Not a cloud seems to be visible in their personal skies but yet they can have all the symptoms of stress. Why? The reason is that their lives have no meaning. Nothing they do appears to matter and so they are troubled. Even if there is no obvious explanation for their feelings of dissatisfaction they can still be due to stress.

Detecting silent harmful stress is not an exercise any person can easily do alone. In order to understand stress, we must have a clear conception of the nature of anxiety and how it is related to stress. Anxiety encompasses tension, nervousness, fear and worry. This unpleasant emotion has a pervasive influence on contemporary life.

Anxiety seems to be the dominant cliché of modern life. It shouts in the headlines, laughs nervously at cocktail parties, nags from advertisements, speaks suavely in the board room, whines from the stage, clatters from the Wall Street ticker, jokes with fake youthfulness on the golf course and whispers in privacy each day before the shaving mirror and the dressing table. Not merely the black statistics of murder, suicide, alcoholism and divorce betray anxiety (or that special from of anxiety which is guilt), but almost any innocent, everyday act: the limp or over hearty handshake, the fifth pack of cigarettes or the seventh consecutive Martini, the wasted hour before the TV set, the pointlessly spanked child, indicate varying degrees of anxiety.

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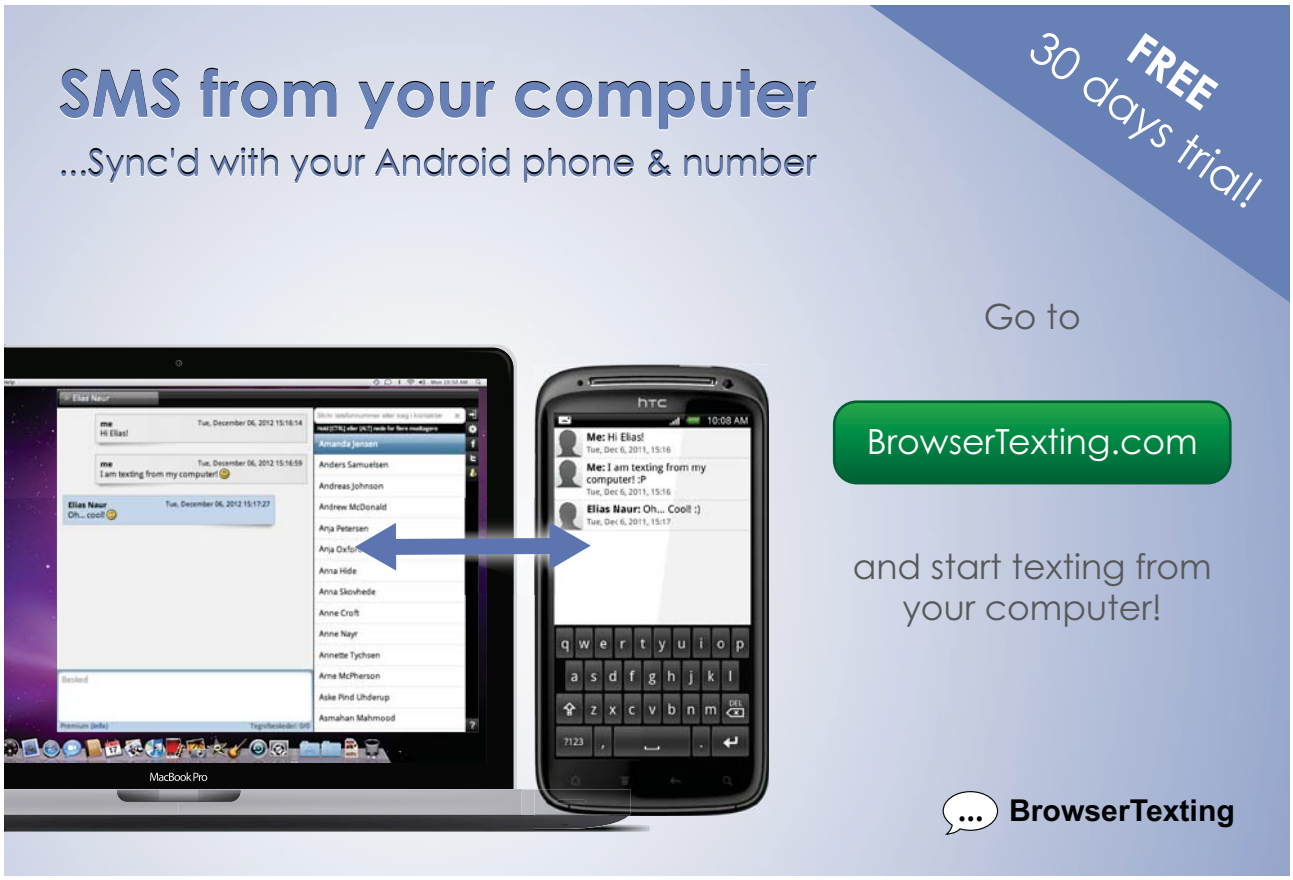
Whenever people interpret a situation as dangerous or threatening, they experience feelings of tension, apprehension and worry. They also undergo a range of physiological and behavioral changes resulting from the activation or arousal of the automatic nervous system. The intensity of the reaction is proportional to the magnitude of the perceived danger or threat.

Feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry – as well as behavioral and physiological changes such as trembling, heart palpitations and dizziness – are often symptoms of anxiety.

The complexity of modern life practically guarantees that nearly everyone will be confronted periodically with dangerous or embarrassing situations that cause them anxiety. There are no universal laws telling us how to handle our stress transactions, because people differ so greatly in the traits they inherit and in their life experiences. However, some general guidelines may help people no matter what their age, profession and creed are, to cope more effectively with life's crises as well as with the ordinary run of irritations and annoyances.



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1.4 Guidelines For Living With Stress and Anxiety

An important first step is to become more aware of the experience of anxiety as an emotional state.

Once anxiety states can be reliably identified, the second step is to watch when they happen and analyze the situations that produce them. In that way, you can discover the sources of threat. This means carefully evaluating the events associated with anxiety states; and also analyzing your thoughts and ideas at the time.

The third step is to ask yourself whether your anxiety reactions are appropriate to the physical or psychological dangers which provoked them. Look carefully at the ways in which you try to eliminate, avoid or cope with sources of undesirable stress.

The most effective means of dealing with maladaptive anxiety is to understand fully the problem and then to develop the coping skills that will enable you to reduce the threat.

Step four is to examine your resources for coping with anxiety.

The fifth and final step is to examine your level of anxiety proneness and see if you can identify psychological defenses for controlling anxiety. If you find that you are high in trait anxiety and make excessive use of maladaptive defenses, then unmanageable stress and debilitating anxiety are clearly serious problems for you, and you may need professional help.

1.4.1 Knowing When You Feel Anxious

Anxiety as an emotional state consists of a unique combination of unpleasant thoughts and feelings as well as internal physiological changes associated with activation of the autonomic nervous system. Anxiety states vary in intensity. Apprehension, tension, and nervousness are experienced at low to moderate levels of anxiety. But high levels of anxiety are characterized by overwhelming fear, sometimes even by panic behavior. Moderate to high level of anxiety may also be reflected in restlessness, trembling, shortness of breath, sweaty palms and muscular tics and twitches. With increasing anxiety, there is also increased heart rate, a rise in blood pressure, rapid breathing and muscular tension.

The particular psycho-physiological and behavioral changes associated with high state anxiety differ, however, from person to person. When you are faced with a stressful situation, you can estimate your level of anxiety by examining your subjective feelings and monitoring your physiological symptoms and behavioral changes.

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1.4.2 Identify Stressors That Cause You To Feel Anxious

Beginning with the trauma of birth itself, many different physical and psychological stressors are encountered in the course of human growth and development. Major life crises like the death of a spouse, divorce or a jail sentence are extremely stressful. But while they have similar effect on people, in terms of the amount of readjustment required to cope with them, the same stressor may affect different people in different ways. The amount of anxiety aroused depends on an individual's interpretation of an event as threatening.

In order to discover the stressors that cause you anxiety, you need to examine the circumstances in which your anxiety reactions occur. When confronted with environmental stressors that are potentially harmful – for example, driving in bad weather, or walking through a neighborhood in which street crimes frequently occur – the source of threat will be readily apparent. In such cases, an increase in anxiety is a normal, natural reaction that will arouse and motivate you to take whatever precautions are required to avoid, eliminate, or minimize the danger.

However, when you feel anxious in situations in which there is no crisis or obvious external physical danger, it is difficult to identify the stressor. By analyzing your own thoughts and feelings in these situations-and especially the nature of your relationship with other people – you may be able to discover why you feel threatened. For example many people are afraid of failure, have exaggerated ideas about the effects of poor performance and worry about how they are evaluated by others. These are all important sources of psychological stress.

1.4.3 Analyze your Stress Transactions: Is your Anxiety Appropriate?

Once you have learned to recognize your anxious feelings and can identify the physical and psychological stressors that cause them, you can analyze your stress transactions. Are they proportionate to the real danger? By monitoring your anxiety and the situation in which it occurs you may also be able to identify the sources of stress that cause you to experience debilitating anxiety.

In practice, of course it can be difficult to decide whether the intensity of an anxiety state is appropriate to the magnitude of the objective danger. One way of doing this would be to compare your anxiety reactions to different stressors with those of other people. However, since high level of state anxiety may distort the accuracy of your perception, it may be helpful to discuss your anxiety reactions and the stressors that cause them with a trusted friend who can help you to be more objective.

Intense anxiety in situations in which there is little objective danger usually indicates an underlying neurotic anxiety process. The source of the danger in such neurotic anxiety lies in repressed thoughts and feelings rather than in external stressors. Irrational fears and phobias result from neurotic anxiety: they are evoked by objects or situations that are, in fact, harmless.

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1.4.4 Examine Your Resources for Coping with Stress

After you have identified the circumstances that cause maladaptive anxiety reactions, you can consider ways of eliminating or avoiding undesirable stressors, or minimizing their impact.

It is often possible to eliminate or minimize external dangers simply by avoiding them or taking safety precautions. For example, people who work in demanding occupations can reduce or avoid stress by taking a restful vacation or changing jobs. But the constant pressure encountered in stressful environments can have cumulative effects. In these circumstances (like the straw that broke the camel's back) even a minor stressor can lead to intense anxiety reactions. Thus, simply avoiding the physical presence of external stressor may not lead to reductions in anxiety, because human beings have the capacity to remember traumatic past experiences and to anticipate their happening again.

When a stressor cannot be avoided, the most direct and effective way of dealing with anxiety is to do something to eliminate or reduce the actual danger. The anxiety caused by day-to-day irritations can be reduced by developing effective habits for responding to routine demands in a timely and orderly manner. Even major life crises can be anticipated and will generally cause less anxiety and fewer problems if one prepares for them by developing contingency plans.

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When a person has a toothache, taking aspirin may provide temporary relief from the pain. But anxiety about the cause of the toothache will persist, and one must eventually consult a dentist to remedy the problem. Simply making an appointment with a dentist may be sufficient to alleviate the anxiety. Indeed, facing up to the problem may even reduce the pain, since high anxiety tends to make us more sensitive to painful stimuli.

The successful management of stress transactions will depend upon the total resources available to a person for coping with a particular stressor. For example, suppose an instructor in a difficult course announces that an examination will be given the following week. The best way a student can cope with the anxiety aroused by the announcement is to study the assigned lessons. The effectiveness of this coping behavior will depend on factors like his study skills, his general knowledge of the subject and the demands of other activities that compete for his time.

1.4.5 Evaluate your Trait Anxiety; Test your Defenses

People who are high in trait anxiety tend to view the world as more dangerous or threatening than do persons who are low in Anxiety-Trait. Consequently, they are more vulnerable to stress and often feel tense, nervous, restless, insecure and dissatisfied with themselves. They are also more prone to neurotic anxiety reactions to dangers, in which derivatives of repressed thoughts or memories erupt into consciousness, and raise the level of state anxiety substantially beyond what would be warranted by the objective danger. Neurotic anxiety is always maladaptive because it mobilizes the individual to adjust to the repressed memories of past dangers that no longer exist.

In their efforts to cope with stress, high A-Trait people make excessive use of psychological defense mechanism. Some also turn to drugs and alcohol to relieve their anxiety. But while tranquilizers and sedatives give temporary relief from anxiety, and are often effective in helping people cope with emergencies and emotional crises, they do not deal directly with the source of stress (and they may lead to dependence, too).

Like tranquilizers and sedatives, psychological defense mechanism can be useful in case of overwhelming anxiety. But defenses such as repression, denial and rationalization are generally inefficient because the energy invested in them could be used for more productive purposes. Moreover the underlying causes of the anxiety remain unchanged and effective coping behaviors fail to develop.

As I have mentioned, if stress is a function of our personalities maladjustment to external stimuli, there must be a way of isolating predominantly stress prone personalities. In the next chapter, we shall look at how people in general can be classified into seven distinct personality profiles. Each one of us if we carefully introspect would fall into one or the other profile.

There will always be stress in life, and really what we have to look at is our reaction to it rather than trying to make the stressor go away

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2 Stress and Personality

It was 8 am in the morning. The sun was shining brightly on the golden sands of the beach as waves crashed upon the shore. Johnny Walker stubbed out his sixth cigarette and checked his blackberry for the fifth time since breakfast. He tossed the cell phone onto the laptop case let out a sigh and waved to his wife and two sons who were playing in the breaking waves. The family was on an Easter vacation, something Johnny and his wife Margarita had been planning for months. Johnny a Senior Vice President (Investment Banking) with a large bank had been working 12 hours a day for last 4 months at a stretch and virtually neglected self and family. This vacation was supposed to be the well-deserved four day "relaxation" and reconnection with the family. However, he could not bring himself to join the family because after every ten minutes of relaxing he would remember that he had to call somebody to check the Nikkei Index followed by the New York Stock Exchange and ensure that in his absence the boys in London were keeping the books of account up to date. He just could not unwind and join the family. On any average day his standard crib was too much work, too little time and not enough energy. He was as a matter of routine dealing with three or four crises in a day sending adrenaline pumping around in his veins. When he returned home every day, he would go into the kitchen, fix a snack of a peanut butter sandwich with a slice of chicken ham and a pint of beer. The garnishing would be his constant companion of a cigarette. He would switch on the television and surf straight away to the financial news programmes. In between he would be fidgeting with his mobile checking for texts and e-mails. His back hurt, he never really knew the taste of the food he was ingesting. He knew he was tired but sleep just did not seem to come as he lay tossing and turning. He would get up and wander back to the sitting room to surf through some nondescript martial arts film. Finally around two forty five in the morning he would manage to drop off to sleep. At 5 a.m. the next morning the alarm in his cell phone would go off and he would get off the bed, still tired and depleted due to insufficient rest. He had a long drive of forty miles to reach his downtown office. The vicious circle would begin again. Because of his chronic bad night, he would add a strong cup of coffee to his daily morning routine. Not having enough time for a healthy breakfast he would once again gulp whatever he could lay his hands on from the dining table and rush out, first to drop the kids to school which providentially was on the way to the office. On the road he would begin turning over the day's tasks and office politics in his mind. By the time he reached office, he often was in a full panic mode, even before confronting the reality at his desk. His last medical check-up had confirmed that he suffered from acid reflux, high blood pressure and was a borderline case for Type 2 diabetes with an enlarged liver. Whenever any colleague saw him and remarked that he looked like a walking corpse Johnny used to sigh, "I can't relax, no matter how hard I try."

He was living life on auto pilot. He did what he thought others expected of him, without pausing to think what it was doing to him. His adrenal glands were silently letting him have it with both barrels as his blood pressure and blood sugar roller coasted day in and day out.

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Johnny gazed out at the beach again. He really wanted to go out and walk through the waves feeling the wet sand between his toes. He had been a good net ball player in college. He picked up his cell phone and started to move towards the patio door. He suddenly felt discomfort in the chest. This was like a sort of tightening pressure in the center of the chest. He started to feel light headed as a sharp shooting pain beginning from below his left ear lobe flashed through his jaw and permeated his left arm. Something appeared to be holding his nostrils shut since he could not breathe. He opened his mouth to breathe. His knees buckled as he crashed to the floor. He wanted to scream. Not a sound emanated from him. His jaw was twitching and he could hear himself gasp. He felt nausea filling his throat. Suddenly he vomited blood and crashed down on his face – never to move again. Johnny Walker had died from a sudden heart attack which had struck like a hammer from heaven.

Stress had quite literally killed him. Here was an ambitious, professionally successful, family man who was hyper active but forgot to take the practical outlook of "if I don't look after myself first I won't be of use to anyone else."

Johnny Walker's saga need not have ended like this. He would still have been around if only he had analysed his priorities and assessed how much of himself to be sacrificed to the carousel of professionalism.

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Johnny Walker is not just a fictional character. He could be anyone of us. He could be in any part of the world, in any country, any organization, any neighborhood, he could be our best friend, our boss, our father, our brother, our spouse – he is the typical location agnostic instance of an upwardly mobile human time bomb – ready to explode anytime due to inability to cope with stress.

Just what is the life cycle of any typical stressful situation?

Stress has been a fact of life since the advent of the caveman. Let us rewind to Johnny Walker. This time he is not the hot shot banker but a paleolithic caveman. His world is not the various stock exchanges and fluctuating currencies but ferocious beasts like sabre toothed tigers, brontosaurus and mammoths. One day he decides to come out of his cave and enjoy the view of a rainbow. Suddenly, he finds himself face to face with a hungry sabre toothed tiger. Johnny is unarmed. Fear, dread, worry and anxiety fill each and every pore of his body. His wisdom told him to turn tail and flee. He ran as fast as he could in the direction of his cave and thus lived to reproduce and over the aeons give the world the hot shot banker descendent who unwittingly carried the same name.

Now the same response that triggered the action in the caveman ancestor sparks a near identical reaction in us today – fight or flight. We call that "stress". As already mentioned stress is our reaction to events or perceived events. It's the approach our bodies use to prepare for a challenge or a difficult situation, where we need to focus, gather strength, stamina and be on high alert. Any event which prompts this reaction is the stressor. In the paleolithic age these stressors were in the form of ferocious dinosaurs, today they are in the form of a wide array of situations from financial crisis, wars, pollution, insidious office politics, etc.

Stress could be viewed from a psycho-chemical perspective. When confronted with a potential stressor, the hypothalamus signals the adrenal glands to start production of more adrenaline and cortisol. These are released into the bloodstream increasing heart rate, breathing, blood pressure as well as metabolism. The blood vessels open wider allowing more blood to flow to the larger muscle groups. This puts the muscles on high alert. The pupils of the eyes dilate to improve vision. Digestive secretions are reduced since digestive activity is not critical for counteracting the stressor. The liver then chips in through releasing previously stored glucose to maximize energy in the process increasing blood sugar levels. When the perceived stressor disappears the nervous system returns to its normal state but leaving the person depleted. When this cycle is repeated several times in close succession, we encounter what could be called 'chronic stress' and is evidenced through signals like insomnia, loss of concentration, procrastination, depression, irritability, feeling overwhelmed, sense of loneliness, alcoholism and substance abuse, breathing problems, gastrointestinal problems, hyperventilation, obesity, high blood pressure, desk rage , backstabbing fellow employees. A certain amount of stress is a normal part of our everyday lives, however, drawn out episodes of chronic stress, negative stress or distress causes damage to the body's immune function. The increased secretion of adrenaline inhibits white blood cell functions and in turn adversely impacts the overall immunity system. A stress compromised immunity system cannot fight infections as well as face stressors and thus leaves the body vulnerable to infections and illnesses.

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2.1 Assessing Stress Prone-Ness

Given the fact that stress is an individual's reaction to potentially threatening external circumstances and events, it follows logically that different individuals would react differently to the same stimulus or stressor based on their personality. Thus there should be a way of identifying potentially stress prone personality traits. In this section, let us see what these personality traits could be and try and correlate with ourselves to ascertain how stress prone each one of us is.

A popular method of assessing stress proneness is through using the Social Readjustment Rating Scale developed by Holmes and Rahe[1]. Psychiatrists Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe decided to study whether or not stress contributes to illness. They surveyed more than 5,000 medical patients and asked them to say whether they had any experience of a series of 43 life events in the previous two years. Each event, called a Life Change Unit (LCU), had a different "weight" for stress. The more events the patient added up, the higher the score. The higher the score, and the larger the weight of each event, the more likely the patient was to become ill.

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Stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the resources he or she is able to mobilize and that things are out of control. Our ability to cope with the demands upon us is central to our experience of stress. For example, starting a new job might be a wholly exciting experience if everything else in your life is stable and positive. But if you start a new job when you've just moved into a new house, or your spouse or partner is ill, or you're experiencing money problems, you might find it very hard to cope.

This tool helps to measure the levels of stress people normally experience during certain events in their lives. Each one of us can apply this to ourselves in order to assess our individual stress proneness.

To score your stress levels, simply check the box in the right hand column next to all the events that have happened to you in the last year. Add the values indicated against each time to obtain your total score.

Some social scientists have suggested that the Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale is weak in certain areas. For example, different cultural groups react differently to different life events. Keep cultural differences in mind as you score your own life events. If you experienced the same event more than once, then to gain a more accurate total, add the score again for each extra occurrence of the event.

	Life Event	Value	Check if this applies
1	Death of spouse	100	
2	Divorce	73	
3	Marital separation	65	
4	Jail term	63	
5	Death of close family member	63	
6	Personal injury or illness	53	
7	Marriage	50	
8	Fired at work	47	
9	Marital reconciliation	45	
10	Retirement	45	
11	Change in health of family member	44	
12	Pregnancy	40	

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	Life Event	Value	Check if this applies
13	Sex difficulties	39	
14	Gain of new family member	39	
15	Business readjustment	39	
16	Change in financial state	38	
17	Death of close friend	37	
18	Change to a different line of work	36	
19	Change in number of arguments with spouse	35	
20	A large mortgage or loan	31	
21	Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30	
22	Change in responsibilities at work	29	
23	Son or daughter leaving home	29	
24	Trouble with in-laws	29	
25	Outstanding personal achievement	28	
26	Spouse begins or stops work	26	
27	Begin or end school/college	26	
28	Change in living conditions	25	
29	Revision of personal habits	24	
30	Trouble with boss	23	
31	Change in work hours or conditions	20	
32	Change in residence	20	
33	Change in school/college	20	
34	Change in recreation	19	

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	Life Event	Value	Check if this applies
35	Change in church activities	**19**	
36	Change in social activities	**18**	
37	A moderate loan or mortgage	**17**	
38	Change in sleeping habits	**16**	
39	Change in number of family get-togethers	**15**	
40	Change in eating habits	**15**	
41	Vacation	**13**	
42	Christmas	**12**	
43	Minor violations of the law	**11**	
	Your Total		0

Score Interpretation

Score	Comment
300+	You have a high or very high risk of becoming ill in the near future.
150–299	You have a moderate to high chance of becoming ill in the near future.
<150	You have only a low to moderate chance of becoming ill in the near future

2.2 Determine How Much Stress You Have

Going by the premise that stress is relative i.e., what is stressful to one person need not be stressful to another. The purpose of this exercise is to identify individual specific stressors so that each individual can evolve customized coping strategies.

Stress generally manifests in symptoms like:

- Tiredness or fatigue
- Difficulty in getting to sleep
- Overeating and/or loss of appetite
- Muscle aches and pains
- Quickened heart beat

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- Sinking feeling in heart
- Increased consumption of alcohol, smoking and substance abuse
- Panic attacks
- Anger, impatience, moodiness
- Memory lapses and lapse of concentration

This list is not exhaustive and only indicative. Often we may be experiencing this day in and day out and assume that it is normal as far as we are concerned. Similar situations may not evoke similar reactions or feelings in another person. Stress is both people specific and cumulative. Often it is one incident after another that piles up and it only takes just one more small event to burst the floodgates and be the proverbial last straw that breaks the proverbial camel's back.

Activities or events that do not agree with our conditioning generally create a psychological dissonance and generate annoyance. If as individuals we do not take stock of these annoyances and realign our conditioning or lifestyles either to altogether avoid the dissonance or accept it for want of a better alternative, we are leaving ourselves vulnerable to annoyances escalating into stressors.

Journaling is a useful practice for identifying typical situations or events that throw us out of kilter.

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Go out and buy yourself a pocket diary. Plan to journalize your entire life for a month. Write down incidents as they occur taking care to record date and time of occurrence. Record in sequential order. For each event recoded, indicate the level of dissonance you are experiencing. This could be on the following five point scale:

1. No stress at all
2. Starting to feel upset – rapid breathing or sweating starts
3. Starting to feel annoyed, anxious or angry
4. Moderate stress
5. Extremely stressed (feel teeth gnashing, abusive, violent feelings, fists clenched)

The top three i.e., those scoring between 3 to 5 on the scale would be the set of situations that burn the individual out.

An indicative instance of a journal could be as follows:

Monday, 18th February

7.00 a.m.	Morning alarm on cell phone did not go off. Overslept by a hour (Stress level 2)
7.45 a.m.	Wife informed that twin sons not ready for school in time. Both have missed the school bus. Have to drop them both to different schools on way to office (Stress level 3)
8.50 a.m.	On the Expressway to office after dropping children in school. Observe a 4 mile long traffic jam. Likelihood of being one and a half hours late to office (Stress level 5)
10.00 a.m.	Reach office an hour behind schedule. Boss is wild. Was also late for a client video conference and boss had to back up for me. Was called immature and irresponsible in front of my colleagues (Stress level 5)
10.30 a.m.	Colleague asked for help. I am already behind schedule but need to help him since his work is an input for the presentation the boss has to deliver to Board of Directors today at noon (Stress level 5)
11.45 a.m.	Too many phone calls interrupting my thought process (stress level 3 in addition to stress level 5)
5.00 p.m.	Still not completed the deliverable that had to be sent to the client today by end of day (6.30 p.m.). Still have another 2 hours of work left after which will e-mail to boss wait for his comments, revise document and e-mail to client. No chance of leaving office before 11 p.m. Wife has called thrice and is upset that I have refused to attend her parents' 50th wedding anniversary dinner. (stress level 5)
11 p.m.	On my way home after sending off deliverable. Traffic is chaotic and someone swipes against the left fender of my new car leaving a six inch scratch. Wife is not picking my phone calls. My heart is beating fast (Stress level 5)
11.45 p.m.	Reach home. Wife is uncommunicative. No dinner made. Open fridge take out three eggs, bread loaf and cheese. Make myself an omelet sandwich. Wash it down with swigs of vodka drinking directly from the bottle. (Stress level 5)
1.30 a.m.	Shut off the television. Stagger to my bed and try to sleep. My lower back hurts, my eyes are smarting and although I am fagged out I cannot sleep immediately (Stress level 5)

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Over a week and then over a month certain patterns will begin to emerge. As an individual, each one of us will be able to identify our top-most stressors.

If we look at those events that caused stress between levels of 3 to 5 we observe:

1. Unscheduled dropping of children to work-uncomfortable with sudden changes in routine
2. Traffic causing me to be late and the aftermath in office

Based on the above, the individual can initiate steps to eliminate the stressors from his or her life. Some of the causal factors would probably be beyond the individual's control, while others definitely can be addressed and eliminated to improve quality of life.

Now both the aforementioned stressors are conditions that are beyond your power to control. However there is a way to address the first stressor. Before sleeping the previous night the individual can recheck to ascertain the alarm is in active mode. If he had woken up in time, he would have realized the children were oversleeping and could have woken them. Alternatively accept and embrace the change in schedule as a temporary disturbance variable so long as it is not a regular feature of your home life.

Regarding the second stressor of traffic, if this is a regular feature, the best coping strategy would be to first acknowledge the fact. Then creatively visualize workarounds. One of the options is to convert the back seat of the car into a mobile office. Get yourself a chauffeur to drive and Wi-Fi enable the car cabin. You can then take all calls and video conferences even which stuck in bumper to bumper traffic. When there is no immediately pending work, you can gainfully utilize the time for either listening to soothing music or meditation.

2.3 Stress Prone Personality Traits

Given the basic premise that stress is individual reaction to situation and events it should be possible to identify different kinds of personalities that are either stress prone or personalities that maintain their equanimity under all conditions.

It is possible to loosely classify human beings into seven broad categories based on their approach and outlook on life. If we were to sit back and ponder, I am sure we would we able to slot besides ourselves, our parents, siblings, children, bosses, colleagues, neighbors and even casual acquaintances into one or the other of these categories purely on the basis of the characteristics they display.

Thus, people from a personality perspective could be:

a) Ambitious type
b) Placid Type

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c) Worrying Type
d) Carefree Type
e) Suspicious Type
f) Dependent Type
g) Fussy type

Short pen portraits of these personality types are described in the following pages.

2.3.1 The Ambitious Type

This is a person who has generally succeeded in everything he or she has attempted in life. He or she is always hyper-active, energetic and cannot stand being still for more than a few minutes. When they are not working professionally they are always busy with one activity or another. They display high standards probably perfectionist, and often get annoyed with others for not coming up to their expectations. Time is a problem since they never seem to have enough. At work this type of person is always rushing from one appointment to another, is always on the phone and has no time to relax. This type gets impatient easily, talks quickly and aggressively and tends to frighten people. They are dominant in relationships to the point of being totalitarian and like to control those around them. They may be holding commanding and leadership roles in their place of work and alienated several of their erstwhile friends and colleagues. Family is just a statistic for them. They would rather die than take things more easily or permit others around them from taking things easy. Relationships for them mean that the other person either lives life their way or leaves and hits the highway.

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2.3.2 The Placid Type

The placid type is a comparatively quiet person and may appear laid back and lazy. Has above average intelligence, enjoys a reasonable standard of living but is constantly nagged by family and well-wishers who are constantly telling them how much better off they would be if only they worked harder. These people never seem to worry about anything and seldom get involved in arguments. Their only motivation for doing anything is because they enjoy doing it.

2.3.3 The Worrying Type

This personality type is generally always 'highly strung'. Possessing hardly any self-confidence, they are worried about doing things wrong. Always seeking approval and appreciation, even when everything going well they are risk averse, worried about the future and hardly ever relax. They like to organize life and crave certitude and stability and are afraid of change which could bring with it uncertainty. Since life is never predictable these people get very panicky at the slightest pretext. Such a person may be well qualified and holding a responsible position in an organization but would never be able to take any bold decisions on account of fear of failure. Neither will this person easily seek new and probably better prospects since they are worried about the uncertainty and would prefer security of the known and therefore predictable scenario where he or she is currently situated.

2.3.4 The Carefree Type

This personality type is a reckless devil may care person. Believing that 'variety is the spice of life' such a person would be a rolling stone by moving round the country from one job to another moving in and out of relationships with gay abandon. He or she would be the life of any social gathering probably everyone's idol – smooth talking, frisky, flirtatious. Well-wishers keep advising them to think about the future and settle down but the thought of a staid routine life appears worse than suicide to them. This personality type apparently enjoys life and vociferously advertises the fact that they live life on the edge. They drink much more alcohol than most people, are chain smokers, and violent and brash when they are drunk. They have had many girlfriends/boyfriends live-in relationships in the past and usually end each relationship after a few months. Life for this personality type is one unending party.

2.3.5 The Suspicious Type

This personality type would be a serious minded person. Since childhood they have been concerned about what people think of them and cannot shake off the perception that people are criticizing them behind their back. They distrust most people and are careful not to reveal their true feelings until they know someone really well. Upon being criticized they brood upon it for weeks afterwards. Even when not being criticized they find double meaning in things that are said and always takes the least favorable interpretation. People around them have to be careful what they say because such a personality type individual would bear a grudge easily. In the face of change, it may take many months for them to settle down. Such people would be jealous and suspicious even of their spouse.

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2.3 6 The Dependent Type

This personality type needs to have the appreciation and company of others as a psychological prop. If they are ever alone they get edgy and bored easily and quickly start looking for company again. This personality type relies on other people a great deal and the thought that worries them most is to be alone in the world.

2.3.7 The Fussy Type

This personality type lives life by the book. They like everything to run according to a set routine like clockwork. They do not like change since they are unfamiliar with the new rules or observe there are no rules of business at all. They are formal in social relationships and plan ahead as far as possible so that their future is predictable. They are great believers in authority and hierarchy and complain there is not enough of it in modern society. People belonging to this personality type would ensure their homes are well looked after impeccable.

2.3.8 Personality Types and Negative Stress

In order to minimize harmful stress our personality types need to be matched to our life-styles. Let's look at the way each of the aforementioned personality types cope with the same external situation to realize why stress affects each of us in a different way.

Let's suppose a reality talent show where the individual has to dance a vigorous salsa. Imagine asking each of our seven personalities to do so. The ambitious type with boundless energy would have no major problem doing so since he or she would take it as a different kind of challenge provided it fitted in with many other demands on their time. The placid type person if he or she was into dancing would also do a fairly good job of the opportunity. The worrying type personality would be thrown into a panic at the thought of appearing in public and on TV and do his or her utmost to get out of the task, as would the suspicious type. On the other hand the carefree and dependent type personalities would probably enjoy the occasion as it would add sparkle and novelty to the day. The fussy type would take the occasion seriously and rehearse his dance with great care, possibly practicing with a trainer beforehand to make sure he looks and sounds the part.

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Our personality types vary in the risk of getting harmful stress and the way in which it is usually manifests. The ambitious personality types are particularly liable to suffer from the physical diseases of stress, peptic ulcers, coronary heart disease, migraine and high blood pressure. The worrying personality types are much more likely to have mental stress. Placid types show the least harmful stress because they are seekers of stability, not of change, and happiest when few demands are made on them. The fussy personality types who like to have the whole of life organized in advance suffer stress if they are repeatedly asked to adjust to changes that are beyond their control. The carefree personality types like the placid personality types also have a much lower predisposition to harmful stress. But their need for variety and excitement leads them into many potentially harmful situations that others would not contemplate. The dependent and suspicious personalities are more likely to have harmful mental stress.

So far we have seen that stress is basically an individual's reaction to external stimuli or stressors, and there are definite personality types that are more prone to negative stress than others. We have also seen there are ways of generally identifying from individual perspective different stressors clearly understanding which of them are under our control to change and which we need to accept and work around.

In the following chapters we are looking at some common situations like workplace to identify the typical stressors that could be found, observe how these disturb peace of mind and ways and means of resolving them. We will also see how conditions of financial well-being and loss of job can lead to debilitating stress.

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3 Common Causes for Stress

3.1 Stress At Work

Work is generally acknowledged to be one of the major sources of stress and, in our competitive society of high achievers, has perhaps assumed disproportionate significance. Most people spend more time at work during their working lives than they do at home.

Stress is often associated with change and uncertainty which is particularly relevant in the workplace. Major changes at work, like a merger or take-over may often bring job losses without prior intimation. These together with the threat of redundancy over a prolonged period are commonly encountered stressors in the workplace. Even if an individual feels secure in his or her job, the work may cause stress in other ways. The desire to progress up the ladder of one's career or chosen profession can make what should be a defined progression through a series of transitions into a highly stress charged experience. The fear of being overlooked or passed by, of not achieving a sought after promotion, can become an overriding pre-occupation rather than a healthy incentive. Just as bad too can be receiving a promotion or role about which you feel uncertain to cope with. Other stressors at work may stem from the insecurity and uncertainty about how individuals are rated by those to whom they are reporting, about their individual areas of responsibility or doubts about their ability to handle an assigned role.

In many jobs, stress is created by pressures from within the individual. Everyone working in any organization – even the chairman or Chief Executive Officer has to relate to and answer to someone else, so stress deriving from inadequate working relationships will be fairly evenly distributed throughout the work hierarchy.

Two of the most common causes of stress to people working in an executive or managerial capacity come in one instance from above and in the other from below. In the first case, it concerns managerial style where individuals need to be reassured and certain that their way of functioning is in tune with the demands of the organization. If it is not, it could fester into a potential source of stress from the very beginning. The second source concerns the realization that the "buck stops here" and a manager is only as good as his or her staff on whom the achievement of results depends. Their competency and willingness to cooperate and deliver coupled with the knowledge of final responsibility may bring with it the sensation of panic so often associated with stress. Another important source of executive stress is time pressure, the way an individual is expected to deal with constant interruptions and demands, telephone calls, meetings, correspondence, e-mails. Unless the individual is well organized, there could emerge a feeling of fragmentation, leading to stress.

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Similarly there is a concept of self-employed stress. Being one's own boss offers unique opportunities for genuine job satisfaction and release from office politics. However self-employment can also create its own set of stress factors and it would be prudent to be aware of these before contemplating a shift to self-employment. Working for yourself can be an isolating business and feelings of isolation can be notoriously stressful – given the realization that you may have no one to whom you can delegate. Furthermore, if you are working from home you may have to cope with snide comments that you are a victim of disguised unemployment and only putting up a charade of being preoccupied or busy.

3.1.1 Causes For Work Related Stress

A number of stressors can arise in the employee situation – these would obviously vary according to type of job but some of the following are common across most geographies and types of jobs:

- **Understaffing:** This can cause considerable stress if, as a result, individuals find themselves over extended and handling excessive workloads, often something that should have been shared between two or more persons,
- **Role ambiguity:** This could arise when an individual has inadequate information about his or her work role, about the work objectives associated with the role, about work colleagues' expectations of the role outcomes vis a vis their specific roles.
- **Role conflicts:** These could arise when an individual in a particular role is torn by conflicting job demands or doing things he or she really does not want to do or does not think are part of the job specification.
- **Inadequate training for the role assigned**: Often organizations pay insufficient thought to targeted training for a specific job or role especially if this training involves additional costs or prolonged absence from work place. Sometimes owing to target deadlines there is not adequate time left for proper role related training.
- **Shift work:** This involves unsociable hours which play havoc with sleep patterns, social life and relationships.
- **Difficult, incompetent or workaholic bosses:** Bosses of this kind are a very common cause of stress. A difficult boss will usually provide inadequate direction but will nevertheless expect results and react negatively if he or she does not get them. Most people have had some experience of this type of a boss – one who hides behind employees' mistakes instead of taking responsibility for them or coaching them, over-delegating without giving due credit or passing off his or her own mistakes by blaming them on subordinates. Such people are very stressful both on a daily basis and toxic in the long term
- **Office politics:** This is to a degree inevitable wherever an individual works. However, given the person's coping traits, office politics could be real fun and joy to some people while becoming the cause of stress to others to the extent of adversely impacting their health.

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- **Too much or too little to do**: Either of these can cause stress in its own way. While overwork definitely does break down an individual, inadequate or no work also could lead to stress where time hangs heavy and the individual is made to feel redundant and marginalized in contrast to his or her colleagues

For many managers their career progression is of overriding importance since by promotion they earn not only money but higher status. However as a person rises in the corporate ladder at middle age and mid management levels their career becomes problematic and most executives find themselves and progress slowed if not actually stopped. Job opportunities become fewer, those jobs that are available take longer to master, old knowledge and methods become obsolete, energies may be flagging and there is the pressure of fresh young recruits to face in competition. This is akin to corporate menopause. The fear of obsolescence and redundancy looms large since age is no longer revered as it was in the past and management is increasingly becoming a young man's world. The rapidity with which society is developing (technologically, economically and socially) is likely to mean that career stability is somewhat elusive thus leading to stress.

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3.1.2 Coping With Work Related Stress

A lot of damaging occupational stress can be pre-empted if we know what is expected out of us in our jobs. A clearly defined, sufficiently detailed description of what the job consists of is one of the best ways of avoiding the uncertainty which often leads to stress. Upon joining an organization it is your right to ask for a job description and not to be put off by vague responses along the lines of "The job is still evolving" or "You will come to know as you enter the role and begin working."

Job Analysis is a useful technique for getting a firm grip on what really is important in your role so that you are able to perform your job well. To do a good job, you need to fully understand what is expected of you. By understanding what constitutes success within a role, you can focus on these activities and minimize work on other tasks as much as possible. This helps you get the greatest return from the work you do, and keep your workload under control.

A job analysis basically comprises of:

- Understanding and agreeing what you need to do to perform well in your job
- Ensuring that you and your supervisor agree on the areas you should concentrate on when time gets tight; and the areas that can be de-emphasized during this time; and
- Making sure that you have the resources, training and staff needed to do a good job

It is important to understand the organization's strategy, culture and vision. Never forget that your job exists for a reason that emerges from the strategy of the organization you work for. This strategy is often expressed in a mission statement. You need to ensure that whatever it is you are doing is eventually helping the organization achieve its mission.

Similarly, every organization has its own culture – its own, historically developed values, rights and wrongs, and things that it considers to be important. If you are new to an organization, talk with older colleagues to understand these values. Make sure that you understand this culture. And make sure that your actions reinforce the company's culture, or at least do not go against it.

Inside the organization, there may be people in a similar role to you who are seen as highly successful. Find out how they work, and what they do to generate this success. Look at what they do, and learn from them. Understand what skills make them successful, and learn those skills.

Talk to your colleagues about the performance appraisal practices in order to understand precisely the behaviors that will be rewarded and respected. Also take a look at the at incentive schemes to understand the behaviors that these reward

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You would thus gain a deep insight into what is expected of you in order to be labeled as an above average worker. Once you are armed with a clearer view of the things that you must do, and the things that you can drop you have align yourself to corporate mission, culture and expectations and thus reduce your stress due to probable misfit or dissonance.

Make sure that you get feedback on your performance and anything else you need to know that affects your job on a regular basis from the person to whom you are answerable. Be clear from the start about how much you supervisor will expect from you to do on your own initiative and how much he or she will want you to consult him or her and escalate to her.

Practice resilience. Learn not to take things personally – learn to accept constructive criticism and don't be put off by colleagues' attempts to undermine you – failure to register a reaction to these is one of the most effective ways of putting a stop to them altogether.

3.2 Stress And Family

Work related stressors do not always stem from the workplace. Often they could emerge from an imbalance or role conflict between corporate roles and those within the family.

Nowadays, executive jobs are usually poorly defined in term of content, time and place. There is always more to be done if the person is willing. Nothing prescribes the maximum number of hours the employee should work and the job is not tied down to a particular location – it can be taken home, onto trains, and planes anywhere the individual himself or herself goes. Lacking any specific guidelines the manager himself or herself must decide how much of life in terms of both time and energy the job should take up. In doing so, he or she must balance a host of considerations. This is the balance between work and those of the family – how much time and energy should be devotes to both. This is not a one – time or one size fits all models and fluctuates with situations. Achieving a balance is a continual source of conflict and potential source of stress.

Let us take a look at the pressures that could arise from the spouse and family. Due to long hours away from home and often carrying work home too, the spouse may well feel the other is a cohabitant rather than a companion. If he or she accepts that the spouses' work takes precedence then he or she is likely to develop separate activities to keep busy and there is a risk of drifting apart. If he or she is jealous he or she may create pressure that could either be amicably resolved from time to time or once again end up in an irrevocable breakdown. The mood of the day due to domestic conditions gets carried over to the workplace and impacts interpersonal relationships.

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In today's world, most young couples are 'dual career families'. Most women after marriage continue to work. For some women the job soon takes a second place to husband and home and they happily opt for the happy homemaker role when it arrives usually planning to return to work when their children reach senior school age. At the other end of the spectrum is the hardnosed career woman who either out of economic compulsion or self-drive devotes substantial amount of energy and time to work rather than home. Given the fact that the glass ceiling is fast being breached and roles have very little to do with gender, we see men and women discharging the same sort of global roles which involve considerable travel and often long absence from home. The working woman then is in a position of obvious role conflict and the relationship she establishes with her work and spouse depends largely on mutual expectations from one another on bearing and rearing of family. Furthermore, mobility in a husband's career progress makes it almost impossible for the wife to develop a working life of her own. This is on account of the fact that she could have difficulty seeing any necessary training courses through to the end, and may sometimes have to leave a job she enjoys and start again at the bottom of the ladder elsewhere and may not easily find jobs in her field in the new location. Some decades ago, a safe bet profession was viewed to be teaching in schools which was eminently transferable and viewed as 'part-time' thus fitting in with social commitments. This nowadays is not really an option considering that the requirements have become more rigorous and information technology is fast replacing the physical classroom and need of teachers. The immediate consequence of such pressures is an increasing number of childless marriages, postponement of starting families. In order to handle such pressures male family members are setting themselves lower ambitions in order to pencil in their spouses corporate and family roles. This somewhere does create dormant resentment in some cases which erupts in the form of marital discord and breakdown of relationships and adversely impacting productivity in the workplace.

3.3 Stress From Losing Your Job

In the previous couple of sections we have looked at stress arising from work and its attendant evils when it impinges on family life. Life is a paradox. Work can give stress, even absence of work can give stress. Losing a job is one of the most powerful stressors and probably second to that of coming to terms with the death of a very close family member or friend. The cycle of emotions is virtually the same, starting with numbed shock, a sense of injustice and "why me?" self-pity, disbelief, anger and then lethargy and inertia. This gradually gives way to an emotion of passive acceptance and loss of identity since the individual is torn away from the structured work regime and network of contacts outside the home. Few people will seek him or her out and the realization that the world and system is carrying on unaffected while the jobless individual is wallowing in loneliness enhances feelings of personal inadequacy and redundancy. If this stage is prolonged, it could degenerate into depression, suicidal tendencies or end up in a heart attack induced by melancholia.

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In such a situation it is imperative to ensure that the individual does not sink into a stage of inertia and despondency. Given the materialistic tendency of the world, it is quite probable that family members may not be able to empathize adequately with the individual or given their proximity to the individual and the fact that their futures are intertwined be undergoing their own collateral stress. The individual thus has to predominantly help himself or herself to cope and ensure he or she remains grounded. This involves forcing oneself to a discipline of:

1. Planning each day carefully to avoid the sense of disorientation. Get up early, may be at the same time as you did when you were employed, bathe and dress up formally and even if you are not moving out of the house, designate a room as 'home office' where you have your laptop, printer, fax scanner and telephone. Sit here from normal working hours. It does not matter what work you do – surf the net, reconnect with acquaintances through business portals like Linked In, trawl job portals, write a book do anything that looks like work. Plan your tea and smoking breaks as you have done in any office scenario. This make belief world takes the mind away from brooding and enables you to focus on either what went wrong in the previous job and also concentrate on positioning yourself for a new job through exploring the employment market and preparing for interviews.
2. Basically you are in a state of burnout. You feel let down or betrayed by your organization. Use the time you are in your 'home office' to understand what led you to this burnout, and ensure that history does not repeat itself. Use it as a wakeup call to re-evaluate the way you want to live your life and what you want to achieve. Talk to someone who you trust and who is experienced in similar situations. Avoid people within your old organization, as they might be biased or still be carrying emotional baggage. Discuss the situation through in detail, looking at the circumstances before your involvement, your workload, your actions and the actions of other people, and the situations that evolved. In reflecting, you will probably find that you made some mistakes. You will almost certainly see that some of the blame should be attributed externally to the situation, to people around you. In your mind, make sure you place this blame where it fairly belongs. Learn the lessons of your mistakes so that you do not repeat them.
3. Expect the best but be prepared for the worst. Make every effort to look and keep looking for a job. Even if no opportunities arise immediately for the type of work for which you are qualified, it may be wise to consider alternative types of jobs if available-perhaps on a part time basis on the premise that it is usually easier to find the right job if you are already employed.
4. Always use extra leisure time available to you constructively, instead of regarding it as a bane, think of it as an opportunity that has never risen before for developing new interests and skills ideally in the company of others to maintain social contact and give you an added string to your bow in search for work

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5. Cash flows could be a bugbear during this phase. One of the best ways of avoiding falling into the associated pit of financial stress is reach out to your accountant or financial advisor and reworking your investments and assessing which ones you could liquidate to enable you to return as close as possible to the financial liquidity status you enjoyed while you were employed.
6. The feeling of aimlessness and inertia has to be countered through exercise and channeling energy effectively. It is imperative to build in a schedule of morning walks, yoga and meditation to maintain a healthy balance in life and release the frustration. In order to reduce the sense of isolation it would be useful to engage in outdoor team games like tennis, squash, football, cricket as well as indoor team games like bridge, canasta or similar activities that involve more than one player and involve deploying the mind.
7. It is important to watch diet. Despondency could lead the individual to either go into heavy eating and drinking binges or become totally apathetic and nibble on snacks. Follow the same meal routine as before ensuring your food is healthy and varied
8. Finally, get out of the house as much as possible

3.4 Finances And Stress

Mishandled finances are a major stressor. In today's busy world, money has become a major stressor. The practice of having multiple credit cards and overspending is a sure formula for going into debt. In a bid to keep up with their neighbors and pressure groups some people are always wanting the newest car, latest electronics and easy credit allows them access to these. However the problem comes later as bills for indiscriminate purchases pile up. The threat of bankruptcy is one of the biggest money related stressors. Money problems lead to stress of domestic disagreements which if left unchecked could lead to complete breakdown of relationships.

Let us step back and take a look at the root cause here. Once again we realize the cause for money related stress is not the external object but our own attitude, our worldview. It is due to our propensity to buy things we cannot afford, to spend without planning that leads us into stressful situations.

This is a stressor that we can easily overcome through rational and conscious change in habits.

People who are consistently living outside of their means need to take immediate steps to change. They need to lower expenses. The first step is to stop buying things they cannot afford. Start using cash or debit instead of credit. As a starting point they should not charge anything new on existing credit cards and work on getting current credit card debt paid off by repaying more than the minimum amount. In fact they should not get taken in by the carrot of paying minimum amount instead of the entire outstanding amount. The vicious debt cycle on account of principal amount plus accumulated interest will ensure that you never escape the trap once you are caught in its jaws. Having got out of debt, make it a matter of principle that you will not buy anything on credit that you cannot pay for in full at the end of the month.

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Having recovered from the debt trap, making a monthly budget to track your daily expenses is a great way to see exactly where the money goes each month. While planning expenses as far as possible cut the luxuries at first. This could be done by dividing your expenses into two categories – that of necessities and that of luxuries. Necessities need to be catered to foremost while luxuries could either be eliminated or left for a later date. Take for example, subscribing to every channel on cable TV whether or not you watch it regularly and even if you do, pause and think what value it is adding to your life, to your knowledge base, to your competencies, seeing a film at a mall over the weekend where the parking fees are double that of a normal weekday and the tickets three times more costly. Look at what you can truly do without, what does not add any tangible value to your life and then make the appropriate adjustments in your budget. In order to live within your income, before you make any major purchase ask yourself if this is a need or a want. We often fall into the trap of buying things like the latest model of the swankiest car only because a face lifted version with cosmetic changes has been introduced, and similar objects which we have no real use for and cannot really afford but bought because they are provided on credit in bite sized installments forgetting that all this is someday going to snowball into a large unaffordable figure.

In order to make this budgeting exercise more palatable why don't we rechristen the budget as "happiness balance sheet"? The governing principal of this balance sheet is "Income one dollar, expense fifty cents, life is happiness, income one dollar, expense two dollars, life is stress and strife."

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Why don't we do a small experiment to create the happiness balance sheet. This will indicate that after meeting all expenses related to necessities how much you have left for so called indulgences or luxuries.

Pull out or revisit the following documents:

- Payslips for last 3 months
- Last year's income tax returns
- Last three months credit card statements and cheque book stubs

1. Put down your gross monthly income. This is income before taxes and deductions for savings etc.). This could be in the form of salary for the employed, income after deducting business expenses for the self-employed and pension for those who are superannuated. Add to this any other interest and dividend income from investments.
2. From this amount deduct about 30% for income tax and other levies
3. From the remaining amount deduct another 20% that will be earmarked for savings and investments.
4. The balance that remains is the net income available for living expenses
5. Now refer to the cheque book stubs and credit card statements and list item by item the amount spent monthly on essentials. This could comprise things like mortgage or house rent, property tax, utilities (gas, electricity, water, telephone, cell phone, internet, cable TV), groceries, essential clothing, essential personal care items, insurances, loan installments, auto gas maintenance and repairs, other transportation costs and child care expenses
6. Subtract the total of all the expenses in Point 5 from the figure obtained in point 4. The resultant figure is what you would have left for indulgences.

It is not enough to simply create a happiness budget, it is imperative to track actual expenses against such a balance sheet to ensure that you are not going overboard.

At the end of this exercise you may well discover that you cannot afford everything you want and may feel dejected. But there is no need to feel cheated or frustrated. This is where you need to exercise your creativity and explore options of how you can get your indulgences or luxuries less expensively or for free. For example, there is no gold medal being awarded to you for seeing an Oscar winning movie on the first day that it is released at a multiplex. You could wait for its DVD to be released and rent that at a much cheaper rate than what you would pay for parking and a movie ticket. Alternatively you could wait for the movie to be shown on some TV channel to which you anyway subscribe.

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Given the fact that the job market is very volatile and there is really no such thing as assured stability it is always wise to keep at – least three to six months' worth of living expense in a fixed deposit account. If you are lucky enough not to have to draw on it, it will go on earning interest and increasing in size quietly. If in the unfortunate situation of your either losing a job, either due to conditions beyond your control or because you no longer can tolerate the work environment, you will be able to live while you look for a new job without the stress of wondering how you will meet the essential expenses during the period. This in a way gives independence and self-confidence which in itself is a great de-stressor.

It always helps in life to have more than one steady source of income. In case you have a talent like singing, acting, carpentry or painting, try and acquire that level of proficiency in it so that you could convert your hobby or passion into a part time business which supplements your income, helps you take your mind away from other work related stressors and provide a potential alternative profession. The awareness of the possibility of your being able to hold out for three to six months if you are out of job coupled with the realization that even if nobody were to offer you regular work in the field you just left, you have a competency that enables you to earn your livelihood doing something that gives you joy, stability and ensures prosperity. That in itself is a great de-stressor.

In a nutshell, by simplifying life, rationally planning expenditure and only permitting oneself those indulgences that one can legitimately afford one can solve all money stress problems and live an anxiety free life.

So far we have seen how external conditions like work can throw up situations that act as stressors to people who are stress prone. Going by the maxim that every problem has a solution we have also learnt about how we can cope with such stressors either through changing our lifestyle or mindset.

We now realize that stress is basically an individual's reaction to external stimuli or stressors. Another important source of stress is the constant self-chatter we have where we through negative dialogue feed our doubts and throttle our self-confidence. This saps productive energy and generates stress. In the following chapter we will see how we can remove negativity from our cognitive process, and guide us on how to break free from stress through adopting a positive lifestyle.

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4 Breaking Free From Stress

We have now come to realize that in the words of William Shakespeare "There is nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so." The difference between being stressed and unstressed is not the external situation but the individual's attitude, approach and response to the situation or stimulus. The only thing we can control is us…our attitudes, our outlook and our choices. We really do not need to stress or strain ourselves over the rest. We just need to focus on what we can control. If this is indeed the case, then it should be possible to break free from being stress prone through consciously remolding our attitudes, thought process and lifestyles. There is a panacea for stress.

Let us now explore the ways in which we can break free from stress.

4.1 Fighting A Negative Mindset

In Chapter 1 we had spoken of anticipatory stress and situational stress. Some jobs are intrinsically stressful. For example, customer service departments in call centers can be extremely stressful, particularly where customers are unpleasant, rude or angry. Production line workers on continually moving production lines can experience intense pressure from the constant, unrelenting demands on their performance. Managing people can be stressful, particularly where managers face regular interruption from staff at the same time that they are trying to complete work themselves.

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Pressure and stress are part of these jobs, and while you may be able to eliminate some pressures, others will always remain. It is important to remember that employers only have an obligation to pay wages, they have no obligation to make jobs pleasant or rewarding. Some jobs are intrinsically unpleasant. If you do not like your current job, then the best thing may be to find a job that brings you the pleasure and the rewards you need.

Major contributors to job stress are negative thinking along with the feeling of having to give into perceived unreasonable demands, lack of information, poor environment, lack of control over work and the pace of work, frequent distraction, and frustration of goals. People can also find that the demands of their jobs conflict with their values, beliefs or goals. This can cause intense stress.

Lack of information can often be stressful, particularly at a time when people may be insecure about their jobs. Many people and organizations communicate extremely poorly, and although managers are often perfectly happy to share information they simply may not think to do it. It can also be very difficult for managers to know that people have misunderstood or misinterpreted their messages. This occurs particularly often where team members are scared of their bosses or are over-respectful to them, and because of such, do not communicate their lack of understanding Often, the best thing to do in these cases is to ask for clarification of the situation. We tend to think negatively when we fear the future, put ourselves down, criticize ourselves for errors, doubt our abilities, or expect failure. Negative thinking damages confidence, harms performance and paralyzes mental skills.

A major problem with this is that negative thoughts tend to flit into our consciousness, do their damage and flit back out again without barely being noticed.

Whenever we are strategizing about any activity and feel a nagging sense of foreboding, it is useful to sit down quietly, take four or five deep breaths and enter an introspective frame of mind.

Look at every negative thought that has crossed your mind. Ask yourself whether the thought is reasonable: Does it stand up to fair scrutiny?

For instance, while preparing for an important review presentation with the CEO you might identify that you have frequently had the following negative thoughts:

- Feelings of inadequacy
- Worries that your performance in your job will not be good enough
- An anxiety that things outside your control will undermine your efforts
- Worries about other people's reactions to your work

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Starting with these, you might challenge these negative thoughts:

- **Feelings of inadequacy:** Have you trained and educated yourself as well as you reasonably should to do the job? Do you have the experience and resources you need to do it? Have you planned, prepared and rehearsed appropriately? If you have done all of these, are you setting yourself unattainably high standards for doing the job?
- **Worries about performance:** Do you have the training that a reasonable person would think is needed to do a good job? Have you planned appropriately? Do you have the information and resources you need? Have you cleared the time you need and cued up your support team appropriately? Have you prepared appropriately? If you have not, then you need to do these things quickly. If you have, then you are well positioned to give the best performance that you can.
- **Problems with issues outside your control:** Have you conducted appropriate contingency planning? Have you thought through and managed all likely risks and contingencies appropriately? If so, you will be well prepared to handle potential problems.
- **Worry about other people's reactions:** If you have put in good preparation, and you do the best you can, then that is all that you need to know. If you perform as well as you reasonably can, then fair people are likely to respond well. If people are not fair, then this is something outside your control. Often, the best thing to do is to rise above unfair comments.

It is best that you set aside your ego and look at your negative thoughts objectively, imagining that you are a third person, maybe your best friend or a respected coach or mentor. Look at the list of negative thoughts and imagine the negative thoughts were written by someone you were giving objective advice to, and think how you would challenge these thoughts

When you challenge negative thoughts rationally, you should be able to see quickly whether the thoughts are wrong or whether they have some substance to them. Where there is some substance, take appropriate action. In these cases, negative thinking has been an early warning system showing where you need to direct your attention.

Having identified the rationality of your negative thoughts, you could prime yourself up through positive thoughts and affirmations. Your affirmations will be strongest if they are specific, expressed in the present tense and have strong emotional content. However, be careful that any positive affirmations made recklessly will not be a panacea for eliminating stress. These have to be tempered with common sense and focused review of the situation to correctly assess whether or not you actually have done whatever it takes to deliver the output expected of you. Not actually completing the background preparatory work and simply praying for redemption and reciting positive affirmations will not save the day, rather it will only increase the sense of foreboding and nervousness and add to the stress. Having reviewed the situation rationally and ensured that you have done whatever you can realistically attain with hard work, you then use positive thinking to reinforce these thoughts.

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Continuing the examples above, positive affirmations might be:

- Feelings of inadequacy: **"I am well trained for this. I have the experience, the tools and the resources I need. I have thought through and prepared for all possible issues. I can do a superb job."**
- Worries about performance: **"I have researched and planned well for this, and I thoroughly understand the problem. I have the time, resources and help I need. I am well prepared to do an excellent job."**
- Problems issues outside your control: **"We have thought through everything that might reasonably happen and have planned how we can handle all likely contingencies. Everyone is ready to help where necessary. We are very well placed to react flexibly and effectively to unusual events."**
- Worry about other people's reaction: **"I am well-prepared and am doing the best I can. Fair people will respect this. I will rise above any unfair criticism in a mature and professional way."**

Positive thinking is then used to create positive affirmations that you can use to counter negative thoughts. These affirmations neutralize negative thoughts and build your self-confidence. It is also used to find the opportunities that are almost always present to some degree in a difficult situation.

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Another way of handling stress due to negative thoughts is through anticipating stress and managing it by being prepared.

This comprises of following three steps:

- Step 1 Reduce the uncertainty through seeking clarifications
- Step 2 Create a Performance Plan
- Step 3 Gain proficiency through prior rehearsal

Through making sure of your facts, and getting a complete understanding of the situation, you can ensure that you are properly prepared, and that you are not caught off guard by predictable situations and events. For instance, if you are preparing for an important presentation to your Board of Directors, you need to clearly know before-hand:

- The size of your audience and the situation or environment you will be performing in
- What the audience wants to get out of your performance
- Where your performance occurs within the program and what will have happened before it
- The mood that the audience will be in. Are they likely to be skeptical or hostile, or are they (as in many cases) likely to be well disposed to you?
- Will the audience want to question you? Do you need to prepare for questioning?
- What else will be happen during your performance? What distractions are you likely to experience?
- What technology will support your performance (equipment, lights, sound, data projectors, etc.)? What preparations have been made in case the technology fails?

Without clarification of these uncertainties, there is a high risk that you will be caught on the wrong-foot if your assumptions are incorrect or if something goes wrong.

For any task, never leap in without a Performance Plan. Begin with making a list all of the things that you need to do from starting to prepare for any activity through to its conclusion. List all of the physical and mental steps that you need to take to prepare and check your equipment, and repair or replace it where it does not work, make logistical arrangements, and think through whether there's anything else you need to do to prepare for the performance. Then, work through each of these steps and evolve a Risk Log wherein you identify and list

- Everything that could reasonably go wrong at each step as well as
- Any distractions and negative thinking that could undermine your confidence or stop you having a positive, focused frame of mind at the start of and during your performance

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Work through all of the things that could go wrong and look at the likelihood of the problem occurring. Many of the things you have listed may be extremely unlikely. Then look at each of the remaining contingencies. These will normally fall into three categories:

- Things you can eliminate by appropriate preparation, including making back-up arrangements and acquiring appropriate additional or spare equipment;
- Things you can manage by avoiding unnecessary risk; and
- Things you can manage with a pre-prepared action or with an appropriate stress management technique

Write your plan down on paper in a form that is easy to read and easy to refer to. Keep it with you as you prepare for, and deliver, your performance. Refer to it whenever you need it in the time leading up to the event or activity.

Also, prepare the positive thinking you will use to counter fears and negative thoughts both before the event and during it.

Finally, by rehearsing properly and fully, you can polish your performance and identify and eliminate problems with it. By rehearsing your performance often enough, you can make it almost automatic.

4.2 Breaking Free From Stress Due to Unreasonable Work Demands

Often we may encounter situations in the workplace where we are neck deep in paperwork chasing our own individual deadlines and attempting to achieve our assigned goals only to be loaded down with what we perceive as extraneous or additional work. For example, several customers can be clamoring for completion of large jobs at the same time. This becomes intensely stressful when you only have the resources to service a few of them. Maybe in order to curry favor with senior management wily middle managers may amplify the importance of simple, low priority requests from senior managers, creating unwarranted pressure on implementation teams. In other situations, the importance of deadlines can be overstated, or additional tasks allocated in ignorance of key pieces of information.

Often, perfectly reasonable people can make unreasonable demands with or without knowing it. If you add into this the concept of "stretch goals", the fact that people making requests may not have correctly appreciated the situation, and the fact that that people may be playing normal commercial games, you can see how problems arise.

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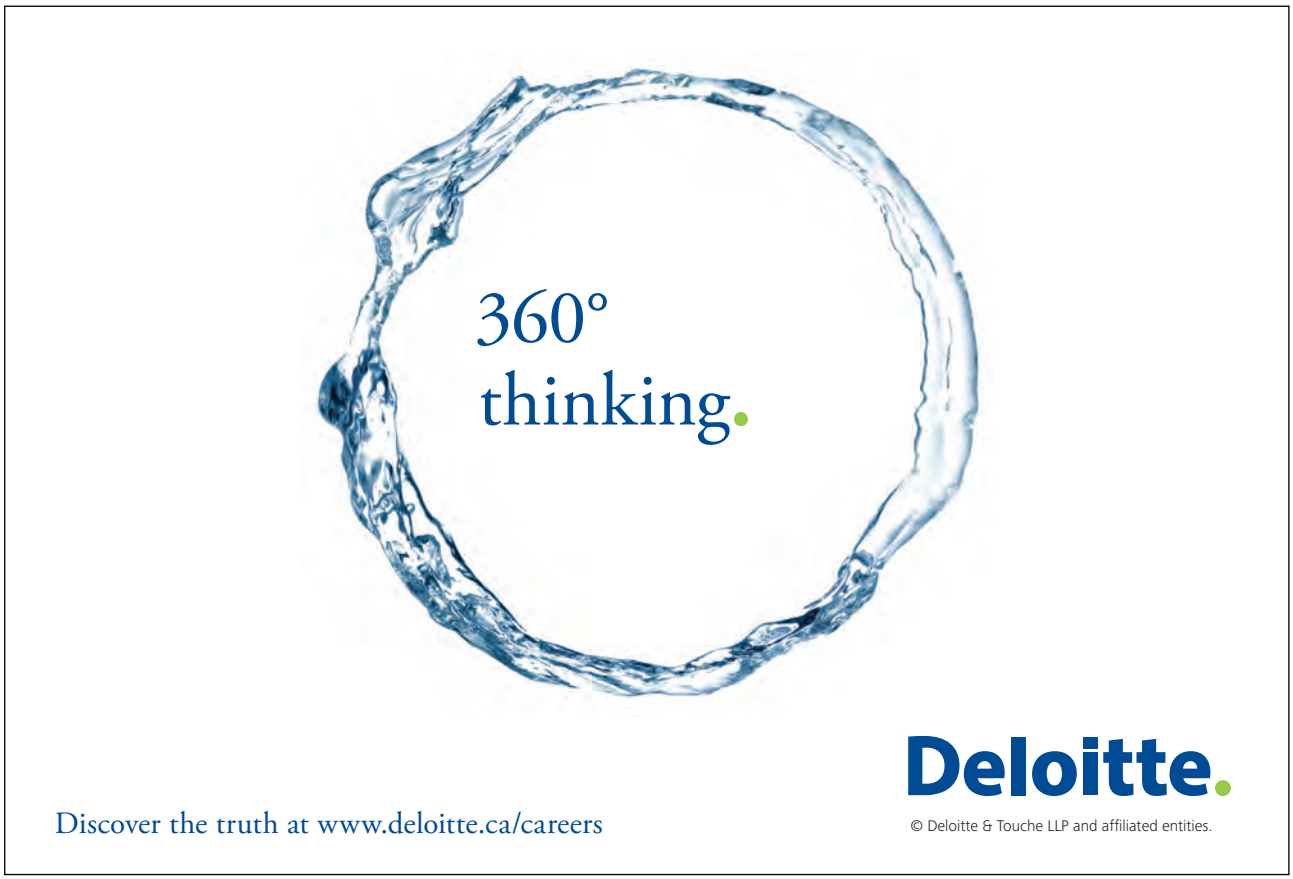
The panacea for handling such stressful situations is to ensure that at no point in time do you give into emotions. It is imperative to adopt a rational and reasoned approach wherein you ascertain beyond any doubt that the situation has not arisen as a result of a misunderstanding, you have fairly tried to understand the other person's position, you have explored all reasonable ways to meet the demands; and have tried to negotiate a fair compromise. It is far too easy to immediately jump to the conclusion that someone is a "bad person" when they make an unreasonable demand of you. In reality, people can make unreasonable demands for a whole range of good and bad reasons.

Your thought process should be structured as follows:

- **Checking your information and assumptions**: Check that you have not made any incorrect assumptions. Then check that you fully understand what you are being asked to do. Finally, confirm when it needs to be delivered. If you are set a deadline, understand why that deadline has been set, and what happens if it is not met. You may find that deadlines are actually much more flexible and arbitrary than they initially appear.



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- **Looking from the other person's perspective**: Try looking at the situation from the other person's perspective. Make sure you are fully aware of all of the facts. For example, if you are working at full capacity and someone asks you to take on more priority work, they might not know how much work you have on your plate. It is also quite possible that what seems unreasonable to you, might seem fine to someone else. For example, a client needing a deliverable on priority order may expect it to be turned around in a reasonable time – the fact that your production process is backlogged may not interest them. You need to step back and shed your ego and view the situation rationally and objectively to ascertain how manage the situation appropriately.
- **Exploring the alternatives**: If the demand still seems unreasonable, think through all the ways in which you might try to meet it. A little lateral thinking may help you to find a solution. Evaluate the impact of any possible solution.
- **Explaining your perceptions assertively**; and in defining the problem, keep information objective and uncolored by emotion. Make sure that your comments are correct, and that they are supported by facts where appropriate.
- Agreeing or disagreeing, and managing the consequences.

It is still quite possible that after going through you may not have agreed on a fair way forward. The other person may be trying to squeeze you to get a better deal than is normal.

In such a situation, it might emerge that you need to request for additional resources or delegate tasks. There is a limit to the amount of work that you can do on your own. There is only so much value that you can deliver to your organization without the help of other people.

Delegation involves passing responsibility for the successful delivery of work to other people, while retaining a suitable level of control over the process and the finished product. To delegate work, go through the following stages:

- Decide what to delegate;
- Find the right person to delegate to;
- Explain the purpose of the job and what you expect;
- Let the delegated person get on with the job and review work at appropriate checkpoints;
- Only accept back good quality work; and
- If appropriate, reward the effort.

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As far as possible, delegate complete jobs. Complete jobs are much more satisfying to work on than unconnected fragments of work. By doing this, you are also more likely to get back well-thought-out, properly integrated deliverables. Once you have decided to delegate a task to someone, let him or her get on with it. Review the project at the agreed project check points, but do not micromanage the task: Accept that there may be different ways of achieving it.

Sometimes you will have to delegate to someone who does not have the necessary experience. Where this happens, bear in mind that inexperienced people will take time to get trained and will initially need close supervision to get the job completed to the correct standard. You should also expect that it will take several iterations before the task is completed satisfactorily, and should allow time for this in the commitments you give to other people. When you first start to delegate work, you will often find that people take much longer than you to complete it. This is because you are an expert at doing the work, while the person you are delegating it to is still learning how to do it. You may even find that you are spending more time supervising work than you would take to do the task yourself. Be patient and persist!

4.3 Breaking Free From Stress By Following Your Passion

In the previous pages we have observed that stress, infact distress is due to a feeling of being like a round peg in a square hole. It is due to a sense of being out of sync or not cohering with the ecosystem within which one is placed. If you don't like what you are doing, then for goodness sake do something you want to do. Follow your passion to break free from distress.

Picture yourself on a cold, wet, sleety morning all alone on an expressway driving along to hell. Your personal hell, my hell, it is all the same hell really. You really, really hate that god-awful hell-hole where you work and don't much care for the twits who work or pretend to work there. As for the boss, your favorite pastime is throwing venom tipped darts at his or her portrait and words cannot describe your contempt, frustration and complete degree of anger and rage that consumes you at the very mention of his or her name.

Life is really too short to waste it on something you hate or something that makes you gasp like a fish out of water.

Do yourself a favor. Introspect what you want out of life. You do not have to be a millionaire to be a happy person. You only need to be comfortable with your personal ecosystem. You can do that by pursuing your passion and stop following the herd.

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Paradoxically, few people in the world really know what their passion really is. One quick way of identifying your passion is to ask yourselves the question," What is important to you? What do you value most?" Through understanding what is important you also begin to understand what you are not passionate about. Think hard about those things or times when you were doing something you enjoyed so much that you simply did not see the hours fly past in minutes nor did you feel hungry or need human company. If you succeed in putting your finger on that activity which has the effect of making you forget yourself and forget the passage of time, then you can consider yourself lucky for having found your passion.

Imagine now how your world would look and feel if you could work full time and be well paid for something you believe strongly and love to engage in. It would be pure unalloyed joy and leave absolutely no scope for stress or distress. Would you like to work full time on something that is your passion even if you could earn more from doing something else which need not enthuse you?

Let me pose the classic age old question. If you had only six healthy months left to live, what would you devote them to?

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Usually the answer to this question is a set of things you would definitely not do. Then people begin to get clarity on what we would like to do. They describe their dream spouse, dream house, dream job. Do any of these exist? If so, why have we not made the effort to find them and enter a comfort zone? If not, can we find or create such conditions? Your passion finding any de-stressing pathway consists of the following steps:

- Clearly define and write down what you really want, today, tomorrow and the sort of memory or legacy you want to leave after your demise
- Look at the things you love to do when you are not bamboozled into doing them
- Think of all those things you would do even for free simply because you enjoy them so very much
- What do you want more than anything else in your life? If you woke up one morning to a perfect life where everything from the previous days had changed, describe what would be different, what would no longer form part of your life and what else would replace those discarded things

Answer these questions honestly, you owe it to yourself. If you come up with the answers, you have found your passion. This passion does not have to be earth shattering – it should however simply be a legal and moral thing, which is yours and yours alone. It should be so fulfilling that when you are drawing your last breath on your deathbed, you never have to utter the universe's saddest parting dialogue "I wish I had…."

So you lucky guys have identified your passion. Now go for it. Often we find people who know their passion but are reluctant to pursue it for a variety of reasons. Push them a bit and they weakly intone they can't stop working on their profession to pursue their passion because they need the security of a regular income. Some of us may not be that lucky as to make our passion our profession. But that does not mean we cannot find the time and money to pursue the passion along with our profession. Let's take a look at the affordability factor. Start by deconstructing what you spend in say a week or a month or a year. First look at those items where you can cut back. Put the money thus saved into investments where it will multiply. For instance, you may be a coffee addict. No need to sacrifice this entirely but do explore if you could reduce your daily intake and thus save. Alternatively, explore the possibility of using public transport twice a week to save on gas and wear and tear of the family car. Now look at the stuff you have that you wanted buy never really needed. Resolve that going forth you will only buy what you need and will actually use. Come on, do you really need eight pairs of jeans, fifty shoes and ten designer bags. Are these more valuable than the activity that is your passion? Why throw away last year's clothes just because hemline lengths or trouser cuffs have either come or gone out of fashion? Who are you trying to impress with expensive designer watches, goggles, colognes and pens? The people who know about these things and also have them would not give a hoot if you told them that you had bought one more high end wrist watch. Those who have never even heard of the names or have heard of the names and cannot afford them will only be sarcastic or jealous. Ascertain you are getting the best or optimal rates on your insurances, mortgages, and utility bills.

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This analysis will clearly show you where you can live on and what you can safely give up. The money thus saved will help you fund your passion. If your passion comprises of a skill or hobby explore if you can turn this into an income maker so that with lifestyle changes and some cash flow you can someday shift lock stock and barrel to your passion – your perfect stress-free world you have always dreamt of.

4.4 Free From Stress Through Time Management

Effective Time management is a key step to a less stressful life. Time management refers to how each of us makes the most productive use of the time we have.

In order to make productive use of time we first need place a value on time. The only way of that is through putting the fear of God into ourselves that time is a non-renewable asset. The clock started ticking the moment each one of us was born, we don't know how long it will go on ticking, but we definitely know that someday it will stop ticking. Someday each one of us will have to return to some unknown source and will never tread this path again. In between the first tick and the last tick of life's clock are several activities and goals we have to accomplish. The first step then is to realize and internalize the sheer limited nature of time, how very important each passing moment is.

Frankly this realization struck me a full five decades after the clock of life first began ticking for me.

I have started regarding my Saturdays as sacred. Probably it is a throwback to my late father who was always laid back on the weekend and the fact that for most of my career I have had five day weeks. The older I get, the more I enjoy a Saturday morning, perhaps it's the quiet solitude combined with the unbounded joy of not having to be at work. Either way, the first few hours of a Saturday morning are most enjoyable. The only hard-core planning to be done is negotiating with Sareena my wife on what time we leave the house so that we get an uninterrupted two hours of swimming followed by her siesta.

But it was not always like this. Saturdays were as hectic as any other days. I was working 13 hours a day – for unappreciative bosses who had no qualms at the end of the year labeling me an underachiever or non performer even if my division's profits shot through the roof. To work off my angst, Saturday afternoons through the noon to midnight was lost in a haze of pipe tobacco and a variety of alcohol, sharing pointless bawdy jokes and generally cribbing about work life to bar room friends who didn't really care. Work always tended to assume priority over everything else – I have probably missed five of my pretty daughter's nine birthdays to date, only because I had to be part of a teleconference that had a thirty percent chance of resulting in a business deal the credit for which would in any case seldom translate into mega-bucks for me. I was secretly frustrated but egoistically denying it to all and sundry.

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A few weeks ago, I was shuffling towards my Club bar for an afternoon of inane conversation with idle friends when I chanced upon Mahesh Goswami an old mentor and now his own lord and master. Mahesh looked radiant and glowing. He had been my friend philosopher and guide for last 50 years (if I exclude the two years I was in my crib) and was in his mid-seventies. What began as a typical Saturday morning turned into one of those lessons that life seems to hand you from time to time. Let me tell you about it:

"Well, SD old chap, you look decrepit." He drawled. "Overworked and over-wrought. I'm sure they pay you well but it's a shame you have to be away from home and your family so much. Hard to believe a fellow should have to work sixty or seventy hours a week to make ends meet. It's too bad you missed your daughters dance recital." I just let out a deep sigh and shrugged my shoulders. Putting an arm around my shoulders he led me to my usual bar stool. He continued, "Let me tell you something that has helped me keep my own priorities." And that's when he began to explain his theory of a "thousand marbles."

"You see, I sat down one day and did a little arithmetic. The average person lives about seventy-five years. I know, some live more and some live less, but on average, folks live about seventy-five years. Now then, I multiplied 75 times 52 and I came up with 3,900, which is the number of Saturdays that the average person has in their entire lifetime. Now, stick with me, SD, I'm getting to the important part.

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It took me until I was fifty years old to think about all this in any detail," he went on, "and by that time I had lived through over twenty-six hundred Saturdays. I got to thinking that if I lived to be seventy-five, I only had about a one thousand three hundred of them left to enjoy. So I went to a toy store and bought every single marble they had. I ended up having to visit three toy stores to round up 1,000 marbles. I took them home and put them inside a large, clear plastic container right on my bedside table.

Every Saturday since then, I have taken one marble out and thrown it away. I found that by watching the marbles diminish, I focused more on the really important things in life. There's nothing like watching your time here on this earth run out to help get your priorities straight. This morning, I took the very last marble out of the container. I figure that if I make it until next Saturday then I have been given a little extra time. And the one thing we can all use is a little more time. So SD my boy-rethink your life and priorities. I hope you spend more time with your family, doing the things you love and which inspire you. By the way this beer is on you sonny boy!!".

I was stunned. I did a quick mental calculation too. 2704 Saturdays gone and really nothing to show for that. How many people had I made happy? What had I created of lasting value – a few project reports nobody read, a few thousand lines of software code, had I really been just to my parents, my wife and children, had I really listened to them with rapt attention instead of waiting for them to stop talking so that I could compose an e-mail in my mind.

Time is free. But it is priceless. You can't own it, you can't keep it but you can spend it. Once you have lost it, you can never get it back again. Out of 3900 Saturdays I was gifted with only 1196 remain? Thank God I still have the choice to wisely spend this! As usual, Mahesh had given me a lot to think about. I gulped down my beer, and hugged Mahesh. Then I dialed my mother who was pretty surprised to hear from me, "Get ready, mom I am coming to take you to the mall to buy the recliner you have been wanting for three months." I disconnected and called my wife. My daughter answered instead, "Babes", I exclaimed "how about a McDonalds lunch and that 3D movie you were saying – grandma is also joining us – by the way I need to buy some marbles too." Her "Yesssssss!!" was the sweetest music I have heard to date.

So count your marbles carefully, and see how much value you can extract from each Saturday rather each hour – because it will never come back again, you will never return on this path nor see the same faces ever again nor their smiles. Cherish and nurture life while it lasts – that is if you really love and care for what you have been gifted with.

In order to really drive home the importance of time management, always think of time in terms of money. The only difference of course is that money once lost might be regained while time lost is lost forever.

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Every single day has 86,400 seconds. Imagine the grace that God has bestowed upon each one of us. Even if we have messed up in our professional and private lives, each day we get 86,400 seconds which we could either use to improve the situation or simply fritter away.

Now imagine that we all have a sort of checking account in the Bank of Time. The CEO of this bank is God. Each one of us has a predetermined amount earmarked for us. This is credited to each of us every morning in installments of $86,400. The conditions for operating this account are that no cash balance can be carried from day to day and every evening at so called close of business whatever part of the amount the individual has been unable to use in the day is cancelled forever. Now each one of us has to draw out every cent and invest it to good purpose or end up losing the money. No overdraft, if you fail to use the day's deposits it is entirely your loss. That amount will never ever return or be credited to your account ever again. Let us pause and do a rough calculation on an envelope with a pencil stub. Honestly, how much have we lost from the Bank of Time so far due to our inability to wisely invest and live in the present on today's deposit.

The three major time stealers are procrastination, perfectionism and lack of punctuality.

Most of the time the sole obstacle to our becoming the person we want to be and doing the things we want to do is ourselves. Procrastination is one of the biggest hindrances to achievement. We need to introspect:

- How much time do we waste answering e-mails?
- How much time do we spend watching TV or playing video games on smart phones and laptops?
- How much time do we waste travelling to and from work?
- How much time do we waste on tasks someone else could do?

Information Technology is a willing partner to procrastination. Emails, phone calls, "research" on computers and smart phones constantly on the internet distract us from our more important tasks while making us feel like we are busy. In this era of constant connectivity we are obsessed with Twitter, Face book, SMS and emails. Most of us are not so important that we need to be in email or electronic real time contact every minute of every day. As an experiment take a look at your Inbox. Eighty percent of what's in your Inbox is not important and comprises advertisements, and articles that clog your mailbox.

At the close of the workday most of us are exhausted and watching mindless TV serials or playing video games or aimlessly surfing the net.

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Frankly this is a major time stealer which does not permit us to pursue our passion and thus de-stress ourselves. Nowadays most cable operators provide the option of recording programmes. Instead of wasting time on shows that fry the brain, pick out shows we simply cannot miss for some value they provide and set them up to be recorded. Instead of watching something for the sake of it, spend the saved time on self-study and perfecting whatever you are passionate about.

In the context of time expended on travel, explore how this can be optimized. Probably if you are driving alone, you may want to catch up with phone calls using a hands free or blue tooth device, or listen to an audio tape or CD of professional content or related to your passion. You may also explore the very need to be on the road for such a long duration. Probably you could replace in-person shopping with on-line shopping, carpooling to reduce the number of trips and free up time for more value adding work.

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When we procrastinate we are constantly feeling the pressures of impending deadlines and being unprepared get stressed. The high priority tasks on our To Do List never get completed because we are so busy with low priority tasks. Procrastinators actively look for distractions like themselves reading all emails, and generally staying busy but not doing the tasks that will get them to where they ought to be. Being busy does not necessarily imply being productive. The way to de-stress oneself is to know our priorities and be specific on what we need to accomplish each day, week, month and year to achieve these goals. We need to focus on completing high priority tasks as quickly as possible so that we have adequate time to devote to other things we want to do. At the workplace, if possible, face your desk away from windows and doors and do not address telephone calls and emails till you have completed your assigned tasks. Avoid time wasters like the internet and social media.

If procrastination is putting off work until you simply feel like doing it or circumstances finally compel you to do it, perfectionism is the tendency to complete tasks only when they appear to be done perfectly. Perfectionists will continue working on a task even when it is already done. They focus on details that don't really matter and thus procrastinate on other tasks that were important and now become urgent. Constructive criticism makes perfectionists very uncomfortable and defensive rather than seeing it as information that could allow them to effect corrections. They focus on what is wrong rather than the good points of what is accomplished. They therefore are generally less happy and feel a greater deal of worry and stress. Goals set by perfectionist are generally unreasonable and sometimes unattainable which causes constant stress since they never can be attained or even if they are reached it is at the cost of other incomplete equally pressing tasks which in turn create conflagrations.

The only way to tackle perfectionism is to be clear as what really matters. Understand that mistakes are learning opportunities. Success is always welcome but failure can be very productive too. Life cannot be boxed up in a neat container with a dandy ribbon.

Punctuality is essential to anyone's efforts to be productive. It reflects the value we place on time both your own and that of others. It reflects your reliability and even character.

Thus avoiding the three Ps procrastination, perfectionism and lack of punctuality will enable better productivity, more time for pursuing personal activities and passions and result in mitigating stress and worry.

Good time management is essential if you are to handle a heavy workload without excessive stress. By using time management skills effectively, you can reduce work stress by being more in control of your time, and by being more productive. This ensures that you have time to relax outside work and also pursue your passions.

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The bedrock of time management is to concentrate on results, not on activity. This is where quite a few of us fall victim to time stealers – activities that consume time but have no value adding outcomes. Effective time management comprises of:

- Assessing the value of your time, understanding how effectively you are using it, and improve your time use habits.
- Focusing on your priorities so that you focus on the most important jobs to do, delegate tasks where possible, and drop low value jobs
- Managing and avoiding distractions and
- Creating more time.

In looking at your workload, think about a rough value of each of the things you do. Where possible, your aim should be to concentrate on tasks with a value greater than the calculated value of your time. Eliminate tasks that have a lower value than your time whenever appropriate.

Some strategies for effective time management for reducing stress are:

- Plan each day by making a To-Do list and rank the tasks from most important to least important
- Introspect to determine during which part of the day you are most productive, have the most mental and physical energy, when you are most creative and when are you generally fatigued. Keep your less energetic times to complete routine tier two or tier three routine activities
- Assign realistic timelines for each task. Leave some lag time for catering to breaks or unexpected additions
- Say no to non-essential tasks or delegate the less productive tasks
- Avoid procrastination, perfectionism and be punctual
- Beware of time wasters – send out a clear message to all your stakeholders that you will only answer emails and telephone calls at specified hours. That will ensure that nothing distracts your concentration and clogs your productive time

There are four things your can do with time. You can waste it, spend it, enjoy it and invest it. Every second of time is money, either you are being paid money by someone and so owe some output in return or you are making money for yourself. Like a wise investor, always make sure that whatever you do with your time, it somehow produces more benefits than what it is costing you.

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Let us always bear in mind Winston Churchill's words that galvanized an entire nation during the second World War, "To every man there comes in his lifetime that special moment when he is figuratively tapped on the shoulder and offered the chance to do a very special thing – what a tragedy if that moment finds him unprepared or unqualified for the work which would have been his finest hour."

4.5 Stress Management Through Exercise

Regarding exercise, we've all been there. The gym membership we subscribe for but use only for a month and keep paying for the entire year. How many of our houses have unused dumb bells, exercise cycles and treadmills gathering dust in the garage or attic? Frankly you do not have to join an expensive gym to de-stress yourself. Virtually any form of exercise, from aerobics to yoga, can act as a stress reliever. If you like to run or walk just go to your nearest park or start jogging on the sidewalk for free. Another way is parking your car at the furthest slot from your office door or mall entrance and walking briskly inside and using the stairs instead of the elevator. This way you could blend exercise into your routine life without eating into work time. So you like to dance. Great! Crank up the music at home and get into a vigorous salsa or jive. It is exercise and good fun too. For those who are couch potatoes and addicted to their TV shows, exercise could be blended in seamlessly. Watch your programme standing up, walking or marching up and down the room doing leg raises or spot running or yoga squats. Another option is to swab your floors yourself, squatting on your haunches all the while. This is called tricking your mind which often tries to suggest seemingly very plausible excuses for escaping exercise. The main aim of exercise is not to train to become some sort of athlete or champion in a competition. Perform some type of easy aerobic exercise for thirty minutes five times a week. This could be in the form of jogging or biking. Always do some stretching and warming up before your workout to allow joints and muscles to loosen up gradually and prevent injury. Warming up only takes 5 to 10 minutes but is imperative. Cooling off after the exercise is equally important once again through muscle stretches. Ensure you are well hydrated with adequate drinking water all the time you exercise. The objective is to relax and thereby take your mind off the stressors in your life. Regular exercise has some direct stress-busting benefits.

- **It pumps up your endorphins:** Physical activity helps to raise the production of your brain's feel-good neurotransmitters, called endorphins.
- **It's meditation in motion:** After a fast-paced game of tennis, cricket or several laps in the pool, you'll often find that you've forgotten the day's irritations and concentrated only on your body's movements. As you begin to regularly shed your daily tensions through movement and physical activity, you may find that this focus on a single task, and the resulting energy and optimism, can help you remain calm and clear in everything that you do.
- **It improves your mood:** Regular exercise can increase self-confidence and lower the symptoms associated with mild depression and anxiety. Exercise also can improve your sleep, which is often disrupted by stress, depression and anxiety. All this can ease your stress levels and give you a sense of command over your body and your life.

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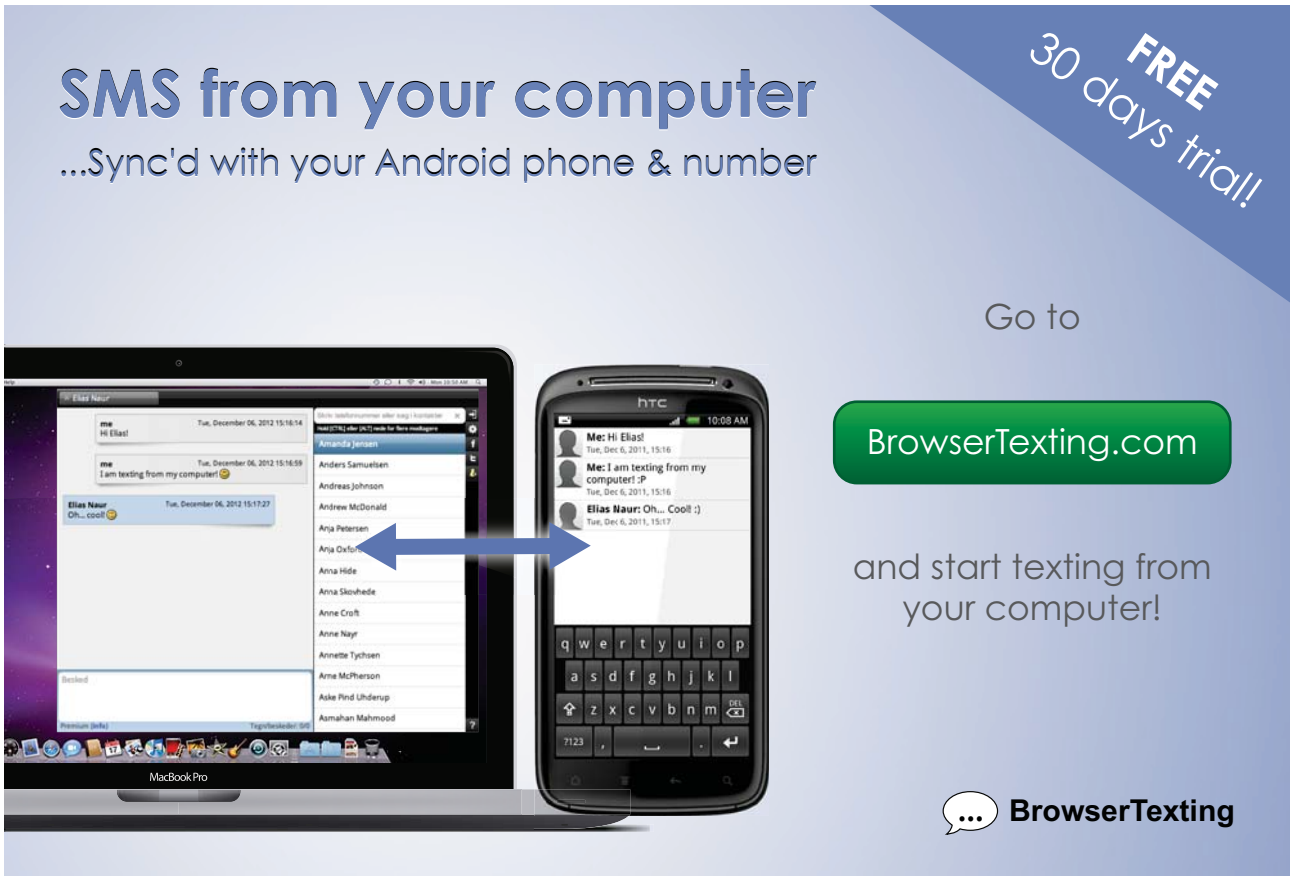
While acknowledging the benefits of regular exercising as a de-stressor, it is equally important to ensure that over-exercising can wear out the body and in turn create a fresh form of stress. You can find any kind of exercise routine and type that suits you and which you enjoy. You need to ensure that it coheres with your daily routine and time pressures. Therefore while evolving an exercise plan keep in mind the following:

- **Consult with your doctor.** If you haven't exercised for some time and you have health concerns, you may want to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.
- **Walk before you run.** Build up your fitness level gradually. Excitement about a new program can lead to overdoing it and possibly even injury. For most healthy adults, getting at least 150 minutes a week of moderate aerobic activity (think brisk walking or swimming) or 75 minutes a week of vigorous aerobic activity (such as running) is a good starting point. If you're new to exercise, start at the moderate level and then add vigorous activity as your fitness improves.
- **Do what you love.** Virtually any form of exercise or movement can increase your fitness level while decreasing your stress. The most important thing is to pick an activity that you enjoy. Examples include walking, stair climbing, jogging, bicycling, yoga, tai chi, gardening, weightlifting and swimming.



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- **Create a schedule and stick with it** Although your schedule may necessitate a morning workout one day and an evening activity the next, carving out some time to move every day helps you make your exercise program an ongoing priority. Exercise in increments. Even brief bouts of activity offer benefits. For instance, if you can't fit in one 30-minute walk, try three 10-minute walks instead. What's most important is making regular physical activity part of your lifestyle.

A few contemporary and popular forms of exercise are discussed in the following subsections

4.5.1 Tai chi (TIE-CHEE): A Gentle Exercise to fight stress

Tai chi helps reduce stress and anxiety. And it also helps increase flexibility and balance. Tai chi is an ancient Chinese tradition that involves a series of movements performed in a slow, focused manner and accompanied by deep breathing.

Tai chi, also called tai chi chuan, is a noncompetitive, self-paced system of gentle physical exercise and stretching. Each posture flows into the next without pause, ensuring that your body is in constant motion.

Tai chi is generally safe for all ages and fitness levels. In fact, because tai chi is low impact, it may be especially suitable if you're an older adult who otherwise may not exercise.

Although tai chi is generally safe, women who are pregnant or people with joint problems, back pain, fractures, severe osteoporosis or a hernia should consult their physicians before trying Tai chi. The benefits of tai chi include:

- Decreased stress and anxiety
- Increased aerobic capacity
- Increased energy and stamina
- Increased flexibility, balance and agility
- Increased muscle strength and definition
- Some evidence indicates that tai chi also may help:
- Enhanced quality of sleep
- Enhanced immunity system
- Lower cholesterol levels and blood pressure
- Improvement in joint pains and congestive heart failure
- Improvement in overall well-being in older adults
- Reduce risk of falls in older adults

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In order to obtain the full benefits of tai chi, it is important to seek guidance from a qualified tai chi instructor and learn proper techniques. Although tai chi is slow and gentle, with virtually no negative side effects, it's possible to get injured if you don't know how to do tai chi properly.

4.5.2 Yoga as a Stress Relieving Exercise Form

Yoga is a mind-body practice that combines stretching exercises, controlled breathing and relaxation. Yoga can help reduce stress, lower blood pressure and improve heart function. And almost anyone can do it.

The core components of hatha yoga and most general yoga comprises:

- **Poses.** Yoga poses, also called postures or asanas, are a set of movements designed to increase strength and flexibility. Poses range from lying on the floor while completely relaxed to difficult postures that may have you stretching your physical limits.
- **Breathing.** Controlling your breathing is an important part of yoga. In yoga, breath signifies vital energy. Yoga teaches that controlling your breathing can help you control your body and quiet your mind.

Working from the premise that "Life is breath, breath is life," yoga places great emphasis on making the breathing deep, rhythmic and effective. Essential thoughts and messages are delivered more effectively when the body is relaxed and the brain is well-oxygenated, helping the body and mind to work more successfully while feeling less tired and less stressed.

Yoga is generally considered safe for most healthy people when practiced under the guidance of a trained instructor. Regardless of which type of yoga you practice, you don't have to do every pose. If a pose is uncomfortable or you can't hold it as long as the instructor requests, don't do it. Good instructors will understand and encourage you to explore but not exceed your personal limits.

Every 'Yogic' technique has its own importance. Yoga exercises are simple and scientifically designed besides being highly effective for different parts of the body. There are specific exercises for every body part to make it firm and free from maladies. These exercises are very easy to perform but give quick results. Some of the exercises are explained below for safer and effective use.

A. EYE EXERCISES

There are three simple eye exercises for toning up entire visual system especially the eye muscles.

a) **Left and Right Movement of Eyeballs**
Stand erect with both feet together. Keep the eyes wide open and move the eye-balls to the left and right sides alternatively without blinking. Repeat the movement ten times each side. It is important that the movement of the eyeballs should neither be too slow nor too fast.

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b) **Up and Down Movement of Eyeballs**
Move the eyeballs up and down. Look at the sky and then look at the ground alternatively. Repeat ten times.

c) **Rotating the Eyeballs – Clockwise and Anti-clockwise**
Rotate the eyeballs in clockwise direction ten times at a stretch and then in the anti-clockwise direction (ten times). It is important to follow a zero, as big as possible while rotating the eyeballs.

B. FACE EXERCISES

Stand erect with both feet together. Join the fingers of both hands and close your nostrils with the help of thumbs.

a) Inhale deeply through mouth making lips like the beak of a crow.
b) Blow out the cheeks and apply chin-lock (bend the neck downwards to such an extent that the chin touches the upper most part of the chest).
c) Hold, the breath and position as long as you can, but easily.
d) Make the neck straight, release the nostrils and slowly start exhalation through both nostrils.

Repeat the whole process three times. Patients of cervical spondylitis, both high and low blood pressure and heart diseases should avoid this exercise.

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C. NECK EXERCISES

There are three neck exercises for the first seven vertebrae i.e., Cervical Vertebrae, Neck Muscles and Throat Muscles. These exercises have the following parts:-

a) **Left and Right Movement**
   - Stand erect.
   - Relax your neck muscles.
   - Look in front.
   - Move the neck to the left and right sides with a very little jerk.
   - Always stop in the middle (looking in the front) for 1–2 seconds.

   Repeat the process ten times each side.

b) **Up and Down Movement**
   - Stand erect with an erect back and neck.
   - Keeping neck muscles relaxed, allow your head to move backwards, without jerk. (If the neck muscles are relaxed you will experience a little jerk automatically).
   - Bring the head back slowly (straighten the neck).

   Repeat the process ten times.

c) **Rotation Movement (with little modification)**

   - Keep neck muscles totally relaxed.
   - Rotate your head clockwise and anti-clockwise (half rotation or backward rotation only) alternatively from one shoulder to another.

   Repeat five times each clockwise and anti-clockwise.

D. SHOULDER ROTATION

Steps:

a) Stand erect and look in front.
b) Keep your fingers (both hands) on the shoulder joints.
c) Rotate your shoulders round in clockwise or anti-clockwise direction.
d) Try making a zero as big as easily possible with the elbows.

   Repeat ten times at a stretch in both clockwise and anti-clockwise directions.

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E. HAND EXERCISES

Steps:

a) Stand erect and stretch your hands in front of chest facing palms downwards.
b) Keeping hands tight and parallel to each other spread your fingers to the maximum.
c) Maintain this position and slowly move the wrists up and down.
d) Maintain hands at shoulder level throughout the exercise.
e) Give maximum movement to the wrists.

Repeat fifteen times up and down.

F. WAIST EXERCISES

Steps:

a) Stand erect with feet (2 feet) apart.
b) Stretch the hands in front of chest with palms facing each other.
c) By twisting on left and right side swing your body.
d) Make quick and complete exhalation at the corners while turning back. Do not worry about inhalation as it will be automatic.
e) Keep hands parallel to each other at shoulder level throughout the exercise.
f) Do not stop in the middle, keep swinging.

Repeat twenty times each side.

G. CHAIR POSE

Warning: Persons with lower back pain should avoid this exercise

Steps:

a) Stand erect with feet together or 5–10 centimetres apart.
b) Stretch your hands in front of your chest at shoulder level with palms facing downwards.
c) Keeping hands parallel to each other, sit down like on a chair.
d) Try to keep your thighs parallel to the ground and your back perpendicular to it.
e) Hold this position for about 30 (thirty) seconds.

Repeat the exercise three times.

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H. KNEE EXERCISES

Steps:

a) Stand erect with palms touching the thighs.
b) Keep back and neck straight.
c) Bend the legs at the knees alternatively with little jerk and try to hit the buttocks with the heels.
d) Then make the legs straight with little jerk at a position so that heels should be about 15 centimetres above the ground.

Repeat the exercise ten times with each leg.

I. EXERCISE FOR CALF MUSCLES

Steps:

a) Stand erect with feet together and palms touching the thighs.
b) Slowly and rhythmically give the heels maximum up and down movement.
c) Keep the body weight on the toes throughout the exercise.
d) Use your calf-muscles as good springs to give smooth movement.

Repeat it fifteen times.

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4.5.3 Stress Releasing Games

Find any physical game that you really enjoy or have always wanted to try. Through engaging in a game that you really enjoy you combat stress head on. You would be doing something you really love and thus also bring a lot of joy to yourself, which is another wonderful way of combating stress.

By being physical you connect with your body and give no space or energy to the stressful thoughts in your head. Some great stress relief games and sports are:

- Golf
- Swimming
- Tennis
- Squash
- Martial arts
- Brisk walking
- Running or jogging
- Team sports like basketball, soccer, rugby or American football.

Playing cards, board games and other indoor activities are another great form of stress relief. By engaging with others and not focusing on the stressful problem, you help to alleviate stress. We are what we focus on, so by focusing on something fun, playful and joyful we become that. Some wonderful games are: carom, scrabble, chess, monopoly and card games like bridge and poker.

Playing with children is also a great way of relieving stress. By engaging with children on their level rather than by your agenda not only helps you to be more playful and happy but also helps you to connect to your child. Again all your focus is on the children, and children being very much in the present don't allow you to get lost in your worries and stresses. Play along with their games, enjoy yourself and let go into the present moment: play hide and seek, imaginary games, tag or whatever your children come up with.

If you don't have anyone to play outdoor sports or indoor games with do not despair. Go to a nearby nature park or forested area and play by yourself running through trees, climbing hills, making dens and letting your hair down. Who's going to see you? And do you really care if what you do makes your stress disappear?

Whatever you do, don't think of exercise as just one more thing on your to-do list. Find an activity you enjoy – whether it's an active tennis match or a meditative meander down to a local park and back – and make it part of your regular routine. Any form of physical activity can help you unwind and become an important part of your approach to easing stress.

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4.6 Stress Management Through Meditation

In the previous pages we have been viewing stress as a sort mismatch between the individual's attitudes and external stimuli. By themselves situations and events just are what they are. Stress and strain are entirely due to how we as individuals view and relate to external incidents. The panacea to stress therefore as already stated lies in working upon ourselves. So far, we have explored how to address involuntary negative attitudes, time management and engaging in activities that we see value or meaning in. In this section while discussing meditation we explore how lifestyle changes could empower us to face external situations with equanimity, in other words without getting perturbed or stressed.

Meditation is a sort of generic term for the many ways to reach a relaxed state of being. There are many types of meditation all of which share the same goal of achieving inner peace.

- **Simply breathe deeply**: This technique is good for beginners because breathing is a natural function. Focus all attention on your breathing. Concentrate on feeling and listening as you inhale and exhale through your nostrils. Breathe deeply and slowly. When your attention wanders, gently return your focus to your breathing.
- **Focusing on an object:** Here, you completely focus attention on examination of an object for the entire meditation. Examine the shape, color differences, texture, temperature and movement of the object. Objects often used are flowers, candle flames or flowing designs, but you can use other objects equally effectively (for example alarm clocks, desk lamps or even coffee mugs!)
- **Guided meditation**: Also called imagery or visualization, with this method of meditation you form mental images of places or situations you find relaxing. You try to use as many senses as possible, such as smells, sights, sounds and textures. Imagine a scene, place or event that you remember as safe, peaceful, restful, beautiful and happy. You can bring all your senses into the image with, for example, sounds of running water and birds, the smell of cut grass, the taste of cool white wine, the warmth of the sun, and so on. Use the imagined place as a retreat from stress and pressure. Scenes can involve complex images such as lying on a beach in a deserted cove. You may "see" cliffs, sea and sand around you, "hear" the waves crashing against rocks, "smell" the salt in the air, and "feel" the warmth of the sun and a gentle breeze on your body. Other images might include looking at a mountain view, swimming in a tropical pool, or whatever you want. Other uses of imagery in relaxation involve creating mental pictures of stress flowing out of your body, or of stress, distractions and everyday concerns being folded away and locked into a padlocked chest. You may be led through this process by a guide or teacher.

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- **Mantra meditation:** In this type of meditation, you silently repeat a calming word, thought or phrase to prevent distracting thoughts. You use a mantra, such as a word, sound or phrase repeatedly silently, to narrow your conscious awareness and eliminate all thoughts from your mind. You focus exclusively on your mantra to achieve a state of perfect stillness and consciousness. Whether it's religious or secular. Examples of religious mantras include the Jesus Prayer in the Christian tradition, the holy name of God in Judaism, or the Om mantra of Hinduism, Nam Myoho Renge Kyo chanting of Buddhism and other Eastern religions.
- **Mindfulness meditation**. This type of meditation is based on being mindful, or having an increased awareness and acceptance of living in the present moment. You broaden your conscious awareness. You focus on what you experience during meditation, such as the flow of your breath. You can observe your thoughts and emotions but let them pass without judgment.
- **Walk and meditate.** Combining a walk with meditation is an efficient and healthy way to relax. You can use this technique anywhere you're walking – in a tranquil forest, on a city sidewalk or at the mall. When you use this method, focus on each movement of your legs or feet. Don't focus on a particular destination. Concentrate on your legs and feet, repeating action words in your mind such as lifting, moving and placing as you lift each foot, move your leg forward and place your foot on the ground.

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- **Engage in prayer**. Prayer is the best known and most widely practiced example of meditation. Spoken and written prayers are found in most faith traditions. You can pray using your own words or read prayers written by others.
- **Read and reflect.** Read poems or sacred texts, and take a few moments to quietly reflect on their meaning. You also can listen to sacred music, spoken words or any music you find relaxing or inspiring.

Anyone can practice meditation. It is simple and inexpensive, and doesn't require any special equipment. And you can practice meditation wherever you are – whether you're out for a walk, riding the bus, waiting at the airport departure lounge or even before a difficult business meeting.

Meditation produces a deep state of relaxation and a tranquil mind. During meditation, you focus your attention and eliminate the stream of jumbled thoughts that may be crowding your mind and causing stress. This process results in enhanced physical and emotional well-being.

Meditation can give you a sense of calm, peace and balance that benefits both your emotional well-being and your overall health. And these benefits don't end when your meditation session ends. Meditation can help carry you more calmly through your day and can even improve certain medical conditions. It helps you gaining a new perspective on stressful situations, building skills to manage your stress, increasing self-awareness, focusing on the present and reducing negative emotions,

Paradoxically, sometimes people get stressed due to meditation itself. They find their thoughts wandering during meditation sessions. Meditation takes practice. It's common for your mind to wander during meditation, no matter how long you've been practicing meditation. If you're meditating to calm your mind and your attention wanders, slowly return to the object, sensation or movement you're focusing on. In the beginning, practicing meditation may be easier if you're in a quiet spot with few distractions – no television, radios or cell phones. As you get more skilled at meditation, you may be able to do it anywhere, especially in high-stress situations where you benefit most from meditation, such as a traffic jam, a stressful work meeting or a long line at the grocery store. Thereafter, you can practice meditation whether you're sitting, lying down, walking or in other positions or activities. Just try to be comfortable so that you can get the most out of your meditation. There's no right way or wrong way to meditate. What matters is that meditation helps you with stress reduction and feeling better overall.

Although we have mentioned that nothing more than a clear intention is required for meditation, it might be useful to consider a few artifacts that would make the entire experience more comfortable.

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- **Meditation Cushion or chair:** It may be useful to buy a cushion made especially for meditation. These are nowadays stuffed with styrofoam beads and rubber. If you are not used to the traditional posture maybe you could also pick up smaller support cushions for placing below your knees and ankles to prevent them from resting on the floor and bearing your entire body weight. Also consider buying a portable yoga mat that can be placed under your cushion and raise it a little higher off the ground and thereby protect your ankles. There are also meditation chairs available in the market. These fall somewhere between a normal chair and a cushion and are made without legs to be placed on the floor and also provide support to the back. Regarding the ideal posture, when you sit, ensure your spine from the nape of your neck to the small of your back is as straight as possible. Your shoulders should be level and chin should be parallel to the floor and tucked in slightly. Your eyes should be relaxed, opened and slightly lowered looking about a meter which is equivalent to three feet, in front of you. Place your tongue on your palate and ensure your lips are slightly parted and your teeth should be touching but not clenched. Breathe through your nose. Your hands should be cradled palms up one on top of the other and be resting four fingers width below the navel and not resting on your legs or feet
- **Loose clothing:** Wear loose clothing when meditating. Avoid wearing belts, watches with tight straps or any other garments that could be restrictive in any way. Baggy pajamas, tracksuit bottoms or loose gym shorts would be ideal. For the top, loose tee shirts would be ideal. In case the ambient temperature is very cold or you are meditating in winter, you could wrap a light blanket or shawl over yourself to keep warm.
- **Timers:** Using the normal alarm could be harshly jarring given the peace and calmness that would descend as a result of meditation. However to keep track of elapsed time you could use your normal wrist watch or clock placed within view on the floor in front of you. You could program your cell phone or iPod to play soothing music as an alarm at the appointed time to signal the meditation is over.
- **Create a sacred space**: This is a space where you can connect with a universe beyond your mundane everyday life. It is an exclusive site for prayer and meditation. It could well be a separate room within the house or office or corner of your bedroom, living room, patio in fact any place which you feel gives you a calm and soothing feeling. Try and keep this place only for meditation and place your meditation cushion there. You could create privacy either by shutting doors or hanging blinds or simply informing family that it is a spot which is strictly your private spot on earth and out of bounds for everyone else, especially when you are sitting down to meditate.

Although a number of Hindu gurus hold classes and seminars on meditation there is nothing mystical about it. It is completely religion agnostic. Try the following generic breathing meditation called pranayama the next time you feel anxiety or stress:

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1. Sit quietly in a comfortable position. Ensure this is one in which you will not fall asleep. Sitting on the floor with your legs crossed is a good position to try. In case you have lower back problems, you may even sit in a straight backed chair with the soles of your feet firmly planted on the ground. Your spine must be ram-rod straight.
2. Close your eyes or focus on one spot in the room.
3. Deeply relax all your muscles, beginning at your feet and progressing up to your face. Keep your muscles relaxed. Roll your shoulders slowly forward and then slowly back. Lean your head from side to side, lowering your left ear toward your left shoulder, and then your right ear toward your right shoulder. Your body will continue to relax as you meditate.
4. Visualize your body as completely empty and transparent. During the first round of breathing, inhale through your left nostril keeping the right nostril closed with your left index finger. Your middle finer must touch the point where both your eyebrows and bridge of nose meet on your forehead. Imagine breathing in and filling your body with pure white light. While exhaling, imagine that any obsessions with material possessions and office politics leave via your right nostril in the form of black smoke. Repeat three times.
5. Hold your left nostril closed with your right index finger and inhale pure white light through your right nostril. Imagine that you have cleared anger and hatred through your left nostril in the form of black smoke. Repeat three times.

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6. Breathe in white light through both nostrils breath out any remaining confusion and negativity in the form of black smoke. Imagine this smoke leaving your body at the point between your eyebrows, the mystical third eye. Repeat three times.
7. Open your eyes, and look around. Sit quietly for a few moments as you recover completely. Every time you are under pressure, this meditation in the form of calm breathing, muscle relaxation and thought control will help to concentrate and keep the brain functioning at its best.

Often when we are stressed, we suffer from headaches and migraine. Meditation is effective even in providing relief from stress induced headaches.

The following meditation helps reduce the headache pain that has erupted due to strain[2]. This can be performed anywhere, be it the office cabin, back seat of your car or even in a cafeteria or the confines of your home.

1. Settle into a comfortable position – sitting in a straight backed chair or lying down are ideal – and start to relax your body with some gentle stretches. Lower your left ear toward your left shoulder. Return to straight center. Lower your right ear toward your right shoulder. Return to center. Repeat four times, leaning left…center…right…center…left… center…right…center. Now lower your chin toward your chest. Let the weight of your head stretch the back of your neck, with your muscles relaxed…do not apply any force…just allow your head to hang forward. Keeping your head forward, roll slightly to the left and upward, back to center…now slightly to the right and upward. Your head will move left to right, tracing a slight U shape. Also do this four times Left…forward…right…forward… left…forward…right…forward. Now return to a neutral position. Look up, gently leaning your head back to stretch the front of your neck. Return to neutral. Look up one more time, stretching…relaxing…and return to neutral.
2. Bring your shoulders up toward your ears…hold…now lower your shoulders. Bring them even lower still…. Return to neutral. Repeat one more time, raising your shoulders up…and then lowering them…. Now relax your shoulders into a low neutral position.
3. Shake your shoulders front to back by bringing your left shoulder back a short distance while you move your right shoulder forward a small amount. Now move your right shoulder back and the left one forward. Repeat rapidly…shake…shake…shake. Relax your shoulders now. Feel the tension leaving your body as you relax. Notice the beginning of headache relief as your muscles relax and let go.
4. Focus now on your breathing. Breathe in deeply. Feel the air you breathe in relax and sooth you. Exhale fully, breathing out all the air…Relaxing as you breathe out. As you breathe, keep mentally repeating “I am” each time you inhale, and “relaxed” each time you exhale. As your thoughts wander, simply return your attention to the words you are repeating

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5. Take another deep breath in…and out…in…out…. Continue breathing deeply and affirming "I am relaxed".
6. Turn your attention now to your headache. Notice specifically where the pain is located. While you breathe in and affirm, imagine that you are breathing relaxation into this area. When you breathe out, imagine exhaling away tension. In your mind, direct your breath to this area.
7. Turn your attention to your forehead. Imagine that your forehead is smooth and cool. Feel the coolness on your forehead – as if a block of ice is a few inches away from your skin, and you can feel the cool air from the ice moving gently across the skin of your forehead. Your forehead feels quite cool – you can feel that the ice is very near, but it does not touch your skin.
8. Allow the feeling of coolness to move along the surface of your face and head. Starting from your eyebrows, feel the cool air on your eyelids and cheeks. Feel the coolness spreading to the top of your head, the sides of your head, the back of your head. It is so pleasant and cool. This coolness provides headache relief.
9. Allow the feeling of relaxation to expand with each breath you take. The air you breathe in adds to the relaxation. The calm and relaxation you are experiencing allows you to experience headache relief. The relaxation is like a bubble of peace and calm, growing larger and larger as more relaxation is added each time you breathe in. Let the relaxation grow, spreading to your eyebrows, eyelids, eyes, cheeks, nose, mouth, chin. Feel the relaxation filling up the space inside your head, the tingly feeling of relaxation spreading down the back of your neck and shoulders.
10. With each breath, imagine the relaxation filling your body more and more. Growing downward from your shoulders…. Reaching the level of your elbows and belly button. Relaxation growing, reaching the level of your hips…knees…. All the way down to your feet. Your entire body is loose, comfortable, heavy, and relaxed.
11. Feel any pain or discomfort dissipating, dissolving…becoming smaller and smaller as the relaxation grows.
12. You are deeply relaxed. Enjoy the feeling of headache relief. Complete and total relaxation, peace, and calm. Pleasant headache relief. Peaceful and relaxed.

In Section 4.5 we had described walking as an inexpensive form of exercise. Surprisingly, walking too can be an occasion for meditation. This can be done either on a treadmill, back and forth in a room, around the block for as long as you want.

Difficult problems sometimes benefit from your taking a good long walk to sort out things in your mind.

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1. Standing still in one place, take a deep breath in... and exhale. Raise your arms above your head as you breathe in again…and lower your arms as you exhale. Breathe slowly, deeply, and naturally as you do a few gentle stretches. Keep your legs straight and bend forward. Place your hands on your knees. Feel the stretch in the back of your legs. Stretch further by placing your hands on your shins…reach down all the way to your ankles if you are able. Hold this stretch. Slowly return to an upright position. Shake your right leg gently, shaking out the tension. Shake your left leg. Raise your arms out to the sides at shoulder height. Keep your arms straight out besides you, now turn your body slightly at the waist to look to the right. Face forward again. Now turn at the waist to face slightly to the left. Return to center. Now lower your arms, and shake them gently to shake out the tension. Gently stretch any areas that feel especially tense.
2. Begin your walk by focusing on your breath for about five minutes to calm your mind and settle into your walk. Walk at whatever pace is comfortable for you. Focus your attention on the rhythm of your steps. Left foot…right foot…left…right…. Allow this rhythm to sooth and relax you.

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3. Bring to mind the problem that you cannot seem to solve. Visualize that each step you take is bringing you closer to a solution. Then focus on your dilemma. For example, you are not sure whether you should resign your job because of a pesky boss and relocate to a new city. Imagine for a five or ten minute stretch that you have made the decision to relocate. Observe how that feels to your mind and soul. Now for the next five or ten minutes switch to making the decision to stay on. Observe how that feels to your mind and soul.
4. For the rest of the walk simply concentrate on the rhythm of the footsteps and your breathing. As your attention wanders, direct your focus again to your footsteps…one, two, three, four…. Continue to focus on your footsteps.
5. Breathe smoothly, in ever-repeating like waves…in…and out…in…out…
6. Hear the sounds of your footsteps. This is a calming and relaxing rhythm…just listening to this repeated beat. Notice all the repeated rhythms…footsteps…breathing.
7. Gradually the mind will clear and automatically, options and solutions will present themselves to you. Some of these may even be entire new and radical, which you had never even thought of in the first place. A sense of calm and peace will descend on you. Thereafter, observe the environment around you…the surface you are walking on…the temperature… the colors…sounds…smells…meld with your surroundings…enjoy this relaxing meditative walk.

Another very powerful way of de-stressing is spiritual chanting. Each one of us is born to the religion that is most conducive to begin our spiritual journey. Accordingly, the aspect of God that we worship depending on our religion is what is most beneficial for our spiritual growth and rejuvenation. The various names of God according to each religion, represent various aspects of the one Supreme God. They all are equally powerful and benevolent. Chanting the name of God according to the religion of our birth, is harnessing divine energy and is akin to taking a general spiritual tonic that is most required for us.

Let us look at a few examples of the name of the Lord we should chant, depending on the religion of our birth

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Religion of Birth	What to chant
• Buddhism	You can chant Om manipadme hum; namo buddhaya
• Christian	Roman Catholic: Chant the Hail Mary Anglican and others: Chant the Hail Jesus
• Hindu	You can chant the family deity name. If one does not know which specific deity is to be invoked you can chant *Om kuladevataya namah.* If for instance, Lord Ganesha is the deity, then chant '*Om Ganeshya namaha*'
• Islam	You can chant '*ya allah*', or '*allah hu akbar*'
• Jainism	You can chant '*Om namo arihantanam*'
• Jewish	You can chant Jehovah, Yahweh, Adonai or one of the many names of God as per Judaism
• Sikhism	You can chant 'Vahe Guru' or 'Sri Vahe Guru' Or the Sukhmani Sahib or the Japaji Sahib
• Zorasterism	There are 101 names of God. Chant the name corresponding to the number provided to you by your priest

Regarding how a person should chant or the frequency there is really no hard and fast rule.

- **Chant however you are comfortable with:** You can chant mentally or you can chant verbally or you can chant with a rosary. Choose whichever method you are comfortable with.
- **Any time and any place:** You can chant at any time and place. For example, you can chant while going to work, while cooking or taking the dog for a walk.
- **Quantity to chant:** The more you chant, the more the benefit. You can start with five minutes a day and progressively increase it to a few hours a day within a couple of months. This can be done in many sessions and while doing other things like cooking etc. as explained above. What matters more is the fervor and intensity with which you chant, not how much you chant.
- **Be regular with your chanting**: Sincere efforts at chanting give benefits like feeling a sense of calm in your life that you have not experienced for a long time or your worldly life getting better.

These are just some indicative exercises. It is suggested that the readers reach out to an experienced teacher or guide who would train them in different and appropriate meditation techniques which they could inculcate in their daily routine as de-stressors.

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Thus if stress is all in the mind, then through meditation, prayer and chanting we can strengthen and train the mind to take a positive perspective to any situation or subsequently detox our spirit after encountering situations that have thrown us out of kilter, and quickly return to an serene state or mind and retain our sanity and efficiency.

4.7 Stress Management Through Healthy Eating

It is becoming more apparent that we are what we eat. If we eat well, we are healthy and stress free; we eat poorly, we have poor health and get stressed easily.

If we are eating an unbalanced diet, we may be stressing our bodies by depriving them of essential nutrients. And eating too much for a long period causes obesity. This puts your heart and lungs under stress, overloads your organs and reduces stamina.

Stress often causes anxiety. Providing your body with a nutritious diet helps to reduce stress and to face problems that arise. The adrenaline increases during stressful periods. Blood sugar levels drop after a crisis and you need food to sustain your energy. Paying attention to diet aids digestion and liberates you from stress and anxiety.

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Some foods create stress in our bodies and some foods help our bodies fight stress. It is important to know which is which. In general, there is one simple rule for defining a healthy diet and that is whole foods are better than highly processed foods. Vitamin C, healthy fats, Omega-3 fatty acids and the B Vitamins are great nutrients that enable us to live stress free. Vitamin C helps the body deal with adrenaline and cortisol levels and is found in fruit like oranges, strawberries and kiwis. Omega-3 fatty acids are a class of nutrients that work on the brain health, mood and stress levels. These can be obtained from plants and from fish. Plant based Omega-3 can be found in walnuts, brussels sprouts, soybean oil, canola oil, and spinach. Salmon is a source of fish based Omega-3 nutrients. Healthy fats can be obtained from olive oil, almonds, avocado, macadamia nuts and sesame oil. Vitamin B is really a group of eight nutrients – B1 (thiamine), B2 (riboflavin), B3 (niacin), B5 (pantothenic acid), B6 (pyridoxine), B7 (biotin), B9 (folic acid) and B12 (cyanocobalamin). Seven of these nutrients are found in fortified cereals while Vitamin B12 is found only in animal products.

Some of the very popular stress relieving foods that we can eat on a day to day basis are:

- **Brown Rice and Pasta**: Brown rice and pasta are well known as wonderful health foods. The macrobiotic diet, which is a well-known health diet, is mainly made up of eating brown rice. These are complex carbohydrates which mean that they will give you a sustained amount of energy throughout the day. Great for maintaining high energy levels in stressful situations.
- **Fruit:** Fruit in general is great for snacking in the office or at home. It is a stress free way of getting some healthy food inside you quickly. If you have lots on at work, fruit is great for keeping you healthy and they are full of vitamins and minerals.

  Bananas really are a magical food supply. They not only give you a boost of energy when you most need it but they are also so quick and easy to eat. You don't need to cook anything; just peel and enjoy! If you find yourself lagging in energy and need a boost especially in the afternoon then bananas are the food stuff to do it.

  If you feel a bit hungry grab some fruit rather than chocolate or crisps. The latter might taste good but will leave you feeling tired after the chemical and sugar rush. It doesn't mean you shouldn't have unhealthy foodstuffs but just be aware of how they make you feel.

- **Ginger Tea**: Although not a food itself, ginger tea is a wonderful remedy for settling a stressed stomach or controlling a cold. To make ginger tea, boil an inch of ginger root in 2/3 cups worth of boiling water for 5–10 minutes. Add brown sugar to taste.
- **Porridge:** High in protein this is a wonderful way to start the day. Not only will it warm you up on an early morn but it will also give you a settled stomach with a sustained energy release. Great for kick starting the body in the morning and putting it in top form for relieving stress.

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- **Vegetables:** An important stress relief food group, vegetables are full of vitamins and minerals – vital for keeping a healthy and stress free body. Vegetables stir-fried with garlic, ginger, sesame oil and soy sauce is not only delicious but a really healthy way of eating vegetables.
- **Salads:** Salads can be a great way of giving the stomach a rest from rich food. Stomachs can really feel our stress so salads made up of lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers and grated carrots can help settle a bloated stomach and give you much needed nutrients.
- **Hot water**: Now this might seem like a strange stress relieving tool but it works. You prepare hot water by boiling water and then topping up your cup with some cold water. It is excellent for settling a stressed or queasy stomach, and for relaxing and cleansing the body.

Starting your day off with healthy foods maintains your energy levels as you begin your daily activities. Eat low-fat, nutritious breakfasts that include fruit, vegetables, oatmeal, yogurt or whole-grain bread and cereal. Even having a piece of fruit or small cup of yogurt helps during those hurried mornings.

Eating snacks during the day helps to sustain energy levels and avoids hunger that can lead to overeating during lunch or dinner. Keep healthy snacks available. They may include nuts, raisins, bananas or low-fat fruit bars you can carry with you. Stock your refrigerator with celery or carrot sticks and other healthy foods for snacking at home when anxious feelings arise. Limit coffee, tea and caffeinated soft drinks. Try drinking fresh fruit juices and herbal teas and plenty of water throughout the day to stay hydrated and avoid mood changes.

Eating smaller, frequent meals instead of heavy lunches and dinners helps to stabilize blood sugar levels. Foods high in carbohydrates may provide calming effects by increasing serotonin in the brain. Whole-grain breads, baked potatoes, nuts, corn, cereal and fish contain carbohydrates. For energizing protein, try eating lean meats and skinless poultry. Replace whole-milk products with low-fat or fat-free dairy foods. Lowering your fat intake improves digestion to help you to deal better with stress and anxiety.

Straight away, you should be aware of the stress inducing effects of the following:

- **Caffeine:** Caffeine is a stimulant. One of the reasons we drink it is to raise our levels of arousal, particularly at the start of the day. If you drink many cups of coffee a day, then you may become twitchy, hyperactive and irritable. You may find that you can eliminate a lot of stress by switching to a good decaffeinated coffee (or an alternative).
- **Alcohol:** In small amounts, alcohol may help you relax. In larger amounts, it may increase stress as it disrupts sleep, reduces your effectiveness, and possibly harms working relationships. Large amounts of alcohol over a long period of time will damage your body. Be aware of this, and keep your alcohol consumption under control.

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- **Nicotine:** While in the very short term, nicotine can cause its users to relax, its toxic effects raise your heart rate and stress your body. If you smoke, try taking your pulse before and after a cigarette, and notice the difference: You will probably see your pulse rate increase. After the initial period of giving up smoking, most ex-smokers report feeling much more relaxed than they did beforehand.
- **Sugar:** Sugar-rich foods can raise energy in the short term. The problem with this is that your body copes with high levels of sugar by secreting insulin, which reduces the amount of sugar in your blood stream. Insulin can persist and continue acting after it has controlled blood sugar levels. This can cause an energy dip.

Nowadays, we not only have fast food we also have fast eating. Eating slowly and mindfully increases the pleasure of eating. You will not enjoy the taste more but by eating consciously you will more likely eat healthier foods. Certain traditional practices like saying Grace immediately before starting a meal and eating formally at a dining table in silence were meant to ensure that ingestion of food itself was not a stressful experience.

In order to derive the complete benefit of nutrients it is important to both eat the right kind of food and in the right manner. The activity of eating too can be viewing as a sort of contemplation or meditation in action. This would comprise the following steps:

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1. Prepare your healthy balanced meal
2. Arrange everything on your table and sit down. Do not start eating immediately. Take time to relax and settle your mind. Set your intention to eat with mindfulness in order to be a healthier person. Express gratitude for the food you are about to eat.
3. Pick up your fork or spoon and place a bite of food in your mouth. Put your fork or spoon back on the table. Chew carefully and thoroughly. Focus on the sensations on your tongue and throat as you swallow. Notice the sweet, salty, sour bitter or spiced taste
4. When you have completely experienced the taste sensations from the first bite pick up the fork or spoon and take another mouthful. Watch your feelings. Are you anticipating the taste? Do you feel your stomach expanding and filling up?
5. Let go of all other emotional baggage and simply savor the taste of food as if you were eating for the first and last time. Bring mindfulness to the act.

If you eat a good, well-balanced diet, you should be able to minimize chemical stress. With a little forethought, you can make sure that your body receives all the nutrients it needs to function effectively.

4.8 Stress Management Through Rest, Relaxation and Sleep

Sleep deprivation is a serious health problem in our overly busy stress filled world. Whenever some people are faced by a stressful situation at work, they respond with complete commitment, by working intensely hard at resolving it. To do this, they may work 24×7, cancel vacations and cut back on sleep, all to make more time to tackle the problem.

If this is short-lived, then negative effects will be minimal and success will often be spectacular. However, if this level of hard work is sustained for a long time without relief, people increasingly risk ill-health and burnout. Furthermore, working in shifts as well as holding global roles are the real slow killers for today's work force. Both may pay big bucks for the short terms but in the medium and long term costs us pretty high in terms of health and wellbeing. Our bodies have been engineered to follow a particular cycle which if constantly changed can throw the entire system out of gear.

We rest and sleep because we need to. Rest is what we do to let stress subside. Rest at the end of a day, and at the end of a week, helps us to calm down.

On an average, people need around eight hours sleep a night (although this can vary between three hours and eleven hours, depending on the person and his or her age).

If we are regularly short of sleep, then our concentration and our effectiveness suffer and our energy levels decline. We have all seen and experienced this.

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This diminishes our effectiveness in our jobs, and can therefore increase stress: As our concentration wanders, we start to make mistakes. As our energy declines, we become less proactive in what we do, reducing our control over events. This means that a situation that is already difficult and stressful can become worse, needing even more sacrifice to bring it back under control.

Make sure you get enough sleep. If you have become used to being tired all the time, you will be amazed by how sharp and energetic you will feel once you start sleeping normally.

When we are stressed and anxious, we can often find it difficult to get to sleep as thoughts keep on whizzing through our heads, stopping us from relaxing enough to fall asleep.

Getting sleep is largely a matter of adopting appropriate lifestyles.

Let's first look at people who are working night shift or globetrotting where the night and day often get confused as they cross various timelines. When we work nights we are actually going against the grain. It is better to work constantly through the nights instead of shifting between day and night. That way the body gets used to one schedule. Those working in the night then need to get sleep during the day to compensate.

In such cases, people would be returning home in the morning during sunlight which could mess up their body clock and make them continue to feel awake when they should be tired. It is recommended that they wear sun glares on the way home to give their body the impression that the ambient outside light is that of twilight. When sleeping during the day, the room needs to be completely dark and totally noise free. You could probably consider using good ear plugs to cut out all external sounds.

Returning to the issue of sleep for those who keep normal working hours we find two broad categories of people. In fact there are three categories. Those who generally have no problem falling asleep and those who although get sleep find it somewhat forced and disturbed. The quality of sleep is not adequate to remove exhaustion completely. The third category is that of insomniacs who just cannot get sleep for a variety of reasons.

Transitory or short-term insomnia happens when people have issues sleeping for a single night or up to a couple of weeks. It is commonly due to one or a combination of the following factors:

- Tension
- Shift or constant change in surroundings
- Temperature extremes
- Exterior noise
- Medicine side effects
- Shift in sleep schedule, like jet lag

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This sort of insomnia commonly sorts itself out and the body's biologic clock will commonly get the person back on track. Intermittent insomnia is if you have short-run insomnia that happens from time to time. It's commonly caused by the same elements as transitory insomnia. Chronic insomnia is trouble sleeping many nights and lasts for years.

Although sleeping tablets may bring a little relief at first, the dangers affiliated with it far outweigh its advantages. A holistic approach calling for analyzing the frame of mind, dietary habits and life-style may establish permanent relief.

In order to optimize sleep and de-stressing through rejuvenation the starting point is to optimize the sleep environment. Think back to the neanderthal ages and cavemen, their dwelling units the caves that were cool, dark and quiet.

The following hygiene and lifestyle factors need to be borne in mind in order to ensure deep rejuvenating sleep.

- **Controlled temperature:** Temperature is important for sleep. Cool is better than hot. The air within the room would have to be artificially brought to a comfortable level. Air conditioning and ceiling fans are useful for circulating and cooling air down to a range of 18 to 22 degrees centigrade.

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- **Condition of the bed and sleeping posture:** A comfortable mattress is important to get a good sleep. Any mattress should support your body in a comfortable position without causing you to toss and turn all night. Pillows and cushions must support the neck without causing neck pain. Ideally the natural way to sleep is on your side with a slight bend in the knees and your arms in front of you usually resting on your chest or face. Avoid sleeping on your stomach since this could result sore neck and lower back problems.
- **Sleep in total darkness**: Get rid of all light sources. Computer lights and television lights are the worst. The alarm clock too should be turned to face away from you so that the digital indicator lights do not create artificial lighting. Use shades or blinds to block out light from the windows. The 24 hour cycle of the sun rising and setting is a part of the circadian rhythm. This rhythm tells our bodies when it is day or night. The human body is not programmed to live in artificially lit surroundings. The pineal gland which is light sensitive secretes the hormone melatonin which is responsible for putting us to sleep at night. This it does when it is dark. However, if we are indoors all the time or in malls and brightly lit night clubs, the pineal gland is not able to distinguish between natural and artificial light and consequently, the secretion of melatonin is adversely impacted. That is why it has been suggested since times immemorial that late night parties and outings negatively impact sleep cycle. Ensure you have no computer, no television and no cell phones at least two hours before bed.
- **Eat right:** A bloated or upset stomach is a sure way to be up all night. The last meal of the day should be at least two hours before bed time. Abide by the tried and tested rule of having a king-sized breakfast, a medium-sized lunch, and a little dinner. Consuming heavy meals before bedtime puts stress on the gastrointestinal system and prevents you from experiencing deep sleep. A light diet rich in carbs like bread or cereals is the most optimal for dinner . Unless milk products cause suffering to you, the age old curative of having a glass of milk before bed-time does indeed facilitate better sleep. Fatty and oily foods, confections, ice-creams are energizing and hard to digest, so keep away from them. Drink at least two liters of water a day. According to Chinese medicine, awakening a lot of times during the night may be due to weakness of the Jing which is stacked away in the kidneys. Drinking enough water flushes out toxins and helps support the kidneys. All the same, minimize your consumption of water after 6 pm to forestall sleep disturbance due to need for urinating.

  There are foods that advance sleeplessness or insomnia and need to be avoided. These are:

  - Refined carbs drain the body of B complex, which the body requires to release serotonin. If the body can't get adequate serotonin, stress, dread, and depression may keep you up all night.

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- Monosodium Glutamate, frequently found in Chinese food, causes a stimulating response in a few individuals. This is nearly always found in processed, refined, and packaged foods.
- Bacon holds tyramine, which steps-up the release of norepinephrine, a brain stimulus that keeps you awake. Other foods that bear tyramine include chocolate, eggplant, ham, potatoes, sauerkraut, sugar, sausage, tomatoes, and wine.
- While a lot of us drink to unwind the body and mind, the fact of the matter is that wine, beer, and spirits may keep you up at night. This is particularly true if you drink more than one. While alcohol may make you tired in the short-term, you're likely to wake in the midst of the night.
- Chocolate may raise your energy levels with bioactive compounds like tyramine and phenylethylamine. Chocolate likewise bears sugar which wake you up as well as the extra obvious culprit, caffeine.

On the other hand, foods that facilitate relaxation and induce sleep are:

- Pumpkin seeds are an awesome source of magnesium which processes to calm the body down. Magnesium assists to relieve the tension that may keep us up all night. Simply 1 oz. of pumpkin seeds bears 151 mg of magnesium, making it among the most magnesium-rich foods out there.
- Cottage cheese bears tryptophan, a sleep causing amino acid that loosens up the whole body and mind. If you don't prefer dairy products you are able to likewise find tryptophan in soy milk, tofu, hummus, and lentils.
- Sesame seeds are robust in trytophan but they're likewise high in carbs with a medium protein content, perfect for prior to bedtime.
- Whole unprocessed grains like brown rice have a calming down effect on the mind. They soothe the nervous system so that the mind quits moving a mile a minute and you are able to doze off. Likewise consider oats for a like effect.
- Chlorophyll-rich foods like spinach assist you in getting to sleep. Spinach, like pumpkin seeds, is likewise loaded with magnesium, which sedates and de-stresses the whole body.

- **Noise should be eliminated or controlled**: Try to sleep in complete silence. Try and mask ambient sounds of road noise, stray and pet dogs barking, people yelling, the air conditioner switching on and off on thermostat.

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- **Ramp down before sleeping:** Make sure that you stop doing mentally demanding work several hours before coming to bed – give your brain time to calm down before you try to sleep. Try reading a calming, undemanding book for a few minutes, again to relax your body, tire your eyes and help you forget about the things that are worrying you. Write persistent thoughts and worries down in a notebook and then put them out of your mind. Review the notebook in the morning and take action if appropriate. Keep the same bedtime. Let your body and mind get used to a predictable routine. As much as possible, retire for sleeping latest by 10 p.m. According to research, it's easiest to doze off and the quality of rest is richer if prepare to go to sleep prior to 10 p.m. If you assume any stimulating action like talking to an acquaintance or watching an intriguing movie after 10 p.m. you might discover your sleep un-refreshing. If you don't drift off inside half an hour of going to bed, get up and meditate or read a book. The same is advised for those who discover themselves awake in the midst of the night. Don't fuss or fight to get to sleep. Any attempt to get to sleep will only make it worse. Remember that a relaxed, unstrained and peaceful brain is the best facilitator for a deep, relaxing sleep.

Brain power
By 2020, wind could provide one-tenth of our planet's electricity needs. Already today, SKF's innovative know-how is crucial to running a large proportion of the world's wind turbines.
Up to 25 % of the generating costs relate to maintenance. These can be reduced dramatically thanks to our systems for on-line condition monitoring and automatic lubrication. We help make it more economical to create cleaner, cheaper energy out of thin air.
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- **Alternative sleep inducting therapies:**
  If you discover yourself worrying over the onset of sleep, you could try this meditation which would help induce relaxation and clear the mind:
  1. Make sure the bedroom is quiet. Get into bed and turn off the lights. Ensure that the curtains or shades are pulled closed to keep out any lights from the street
  2. Find a comfortable sleeping position. You can change positions if needed, but try not to move around very much.
  3. Stretch out on your back and get comfortable. Tense up your body as much as you can and then relax. Do this three times
  4. Slowly breathe into your lower abdomen twenty times
  5. With each in-breath breathe in peace, and with each out breath breathe out cares of the day.
  6. Visualize entering a place you have actually visited and recall as peaceful, restful, beautiful and happy. Relive your experience. Close your eyes and hear sounds of running water and birds, and feel the warmth of the sun and a gentle breeze on your body
  7. Release your worries and visualize. Surrender to deep relaxation as you let go more and more. Feel yourself sinking into a deep healing and rejuvenating sleep.

  Rub down your body with oil a couple of times a week before having a bath. Oil massage is a good way to de-stress. Apart from de-stressing and relaxing, it provides host of advantages like elimination of toxins from the body, lubricates joints, improves the complexion and relieves fatigue and expands energy levels. For most individuals, sesame oil will do. All the same, a few might find it a bit hot. They may utilize coconut oil alternatively. One may even add few drops of aromatherapy oils to heighten the experience. Warm the oil a little. Heat a little water in a wide bottom dish and then put the oil container over this water to heat up the oil. Massage the oil all over your body with round motion over flat areas like belly and chest and straight strokes for arms and legs. Let the oil stand for at the least half an hour and then have a warm shower or bath.

The law of cause and effect underlies everything in the cosmos. If there is any event or incident it has to have a cause. If the causal conditions are changed the effect will definitely change. So far we have observed that stress is the outcome of an interaction between a person and a set of external stimuli. The external stimuli are simply there – neither good nor bad, neither inducing joy nor creating stress. Joy and stress are caused through the attitude of each person and the manner in which he or she relates to the specific stimulus. The panacea for stress-moving from distress to de-stress, lies in working on the cause. This chapter has therefore described different ways through which any individual irrespective of color, creed, nationality and gender can control their emotions, attitudes, thoughts and lifestyle in order to face any situation without cracking up.

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5 End Notes

In Hindu thought, the Law of Karma was expounded by Lord Krishna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The word 'karma' has been given many negative meanings. In common language, most people almost always relate it to suffering, but the simplest meaning of karma is action. Newton's Third Law of Physics (every action has an equal and opposite reaction) is a physical law of motion. The Law of Karma is the metaphysical (non-physical) equivalent of Newton's Third Law – it refers to action and its result (fruit) or, simply, cause and effect. The quality of our actions, thoughts more specifically, determines our personal level of happiness. Our natures today are the result of everything we have thought, they are formed by our thoughts. We are responsible for our own state of affairs. Whatever we are today, rich, poor, stressed or joyful is entirely the outcome of our previous actions. That we make our own destiny is indeed a very invigorating and empowering thought. It implies that going forth being stressed is entirely in our own hands. It does not imply that life will cease to fling bouncers at us. It only states that we can condition ourselves not to be thrown off-balance, not to get overawed or stressed by the bouncers flung at us. The various ways in which any individual can recondition or reprogramme himself or herself have been described in this book. This book would be worth its cost and effort only if the reader does not dismiss it as another casual airport lounge reading self-help book. Look at it as a sort of operating manual for life itself. It is a means for each one of us to empower ourselves and identify a uniquely corrective course that enables us to emerge on top of situations and not let the situations drive us prematurely to our deathbeds.

Whenever confronted with any situation which apparently appears daunting or threatening don't go under immediately. Sit back, take a few deep breaths as described in this book and work upon yourself.

- Don't be overwhelmed by small things; try and see the bigger picture. Is your problem really as bad as you're making it out to be? The chances are there will be many people worse off than you. Instead of zoning in on certain things and panicking about them, put everything into perspective. Does this problem affect your entire life? Will you still be panicking about this in a few weeks or months' time? If the answer is no, then it's really not worth the worry.

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- Frankly get practical. When faced with a situation which apparently is alarming ask yourself if getting anxious, worried or stressed will definitely help resolve the issue. If it does, go ahead and get completely stressed. Obviously it will only sap your energy and be counterproductive. So the best way ahead is to confront the situation rationally. Firstly, accept it for what it is. Good, bad ugly, the elephant in the room exists – accept that fact dispassionately for what it is. No need to get emotional. Now deconstruct the situation to identify its causal factors. In other words, why or how did it occur? Next examine whether something can be done to reverse the impact of the causal factors. If there is a possibility of doing so, create a plan of action and roll it out. In case there is nothing substantial that can be done to rectify the situation, once again accept the damage as irrevocable along with its consequences. However, try and extract whatever learning you can from the situation so that it does not repeat itself in the future. Either way you are in a win-win scenario. Either you push the elephant out of the room and regain control or learn how to ensure that in future the elephant never enters the room without your prior consent. Let's drive this point home with an example. You had some important documents and emails in your computer server. One not so fine day without warning the server crashes and you suddenly lose access to all archived data. The options before you are to break out into a cold sweat and get reduced to a trembling jelly. Obviously that will not help recover data. The other option is to explore whether somebody in your team has back-ups of all or some data probably stored on a different machine or location and pull that back into your process. If nothing else works, try and recreate the most recent data from memory and going forth create a disaster management and business recovery strategy that will take care of such situations in the future.
- Think positive, speak positive and associate with positive people. Enjoy all that each good moment has to offer. An abundance of happiness can work wonders in your life! Feeling happy can have a positive impact on your health, productivity and relationships. Make an effort each day to think of something great in your life or say something nice about someone you know. Make it your goal to become a positive influence on others
- There's nothing more stressful than work related pressure. Maintain a home-work balance and try to keep these two separate. You will remain stressed if you constantly talk about the problems that affect you at work. Beyond normal working hours, block such thoughts and try to spend time doing things you enjoy. Listen to music, watch a movie or go out with your family and friends. No matter what, do not let yourself be suffocated with work related issues. If you have anticipated issues and prepared well in advance there is really no need to sweat in terror of tomorrow. It will only affect your productivity in the long run.
- Exercise regularly to fight stress! Physical movement can lower blood pressure, lift your mood, curbs those food cravings and even help you sleep better at night. Try walking or biking to work. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Get active! A little effort can go a long way!

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- Laughter is a great weapon against stress. During laughter, blood pressure is lowered and there is in an increase in blood flow and in oxygenation of the blood. Laughter also gives your diaphragm, abs, respiratory, facial, leg and back muscles a real workout! Laughter can also bring balance to your immune system and release feel-good brain chemicals in your brain called endorphins which can relieve pain. There may be a lot more truth than we think in the phrase "laughter is the best medicine"!

Never forget Victor Frankl's empowering words that "Everything can be taken away from a man but one thing, the right to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances". Victor, a Jewish Austrian psychiatrist was captured and placed in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II. There he lost his family members and friends one by one, due to inhuman atrocities and brutal torture. Yet he emerged from this ordeal both empowered and wizened as he envisioned freedom. Despite his suffering, he nurtured a meaning for his life. He had a positive attitude and did not surrender to despair. Post his release, he chose to share his wisdom rather than live an embittered life by developing a psychological treatment called logo therapy. Through this he helped several people to reframe their 'meanings' and reconstruct a unique purpose for themselves.

It is entirely in our hands and minds to consciously choose to envision and transform our circumstances – rather than being influenced by fear, anger or any other negative force during adversity.

Our world has become an increasingly noisy place. We're constantly surrounded by sounds from traffic, cell phones, television, even other people. This can be detrimental to health. Take some daily time away from unwanted noise and enjoy some peace and quiet. You will start to feel more relaxed in as little as half an hour.

If you find it difficult to sleep, try listening to some soothing music. You could even try aroma therapy. Bathing in warm water just before you go to sleep will calm your senses. In fact having a warm glass of milk helps in more ways than one. Avoid consuming sugar, caffeine or a heavy meal just before you go to bed. Deep breathing would help you to relieve tension and fall asleep. Quantity and quality are very important. Most adults need between 7 to 8 hours of uninterrupted sleep. Try to go to bed at the same time and get up at the same time every day. Getting up at the same time is most important. Avoid all stimulants in the evening, including chocolate, caffeinated sodas, and caffeinated teas.

Let's close with a small parable that illustrates the positive attitude to life. If you haven't heard it before, pay attention – it may just change your life. If you have heard something like this before, hear it again. There's nothing wrong with a little refresher! Then pass it on…. Once again this emerges from my mentor Mahesh Goswami who true to his nature was sharing his secret of how to live life king-size – like a majestic lion in a forest.

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One morning Mahesh stood in front of me and some beer drinking friends and wordlessly began to fill a very large, empty transparent jar with golf balls. He then asked us if the jar was full. We agreed that it was. Mahesh picked up a box of tiny pebbles and tipped them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly allowing the pebbles to roll into the open areas between the golf balls before asking us once again if the jar was full. We agreed it was. Next he poured a box of sand into the jar filling up all the remaining space and once more asked us if the jar was full. We responded with a unanimous "yes." Mahesh then produced two glasses of red wine from under the table and poured the entire contents into the jar, as we burst out laughing. "Now," said Mahesh, as the laughter subsided, "I want you to recognize that this jar represents your life. The 'golf balls' are the important things – your family, your children, your health, your friends and your passions. In other words, all those things that if everything else was lost, and if only they remained, your life would still be full. The 'pebbles' are the other things that matter like your job, your house, your car, holidays, etc. The sand is everything else, all the small stuff. Now if you put the sand into the jar first," he continued, "there is no room for the 'pebbles' or the 'golf balls'. The same goes for life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are truly important to you. So pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness, play with your children, take care of your health, make time for your friends, and go out to dinner with your partner because there will always be time to clean the house and fix the car. Set your priorities and take care of the 'golf balls' first, for they are the things that really matter. All the rest is just sand." One of the group raised his hand and asked, "What does the wine represent?" Mahesh grinned like a Cheshire cat, "I'm glad you asked. I was also showing you that no matter how full your life may seem, there's always room for a couple of glasses of wine with a friend." He took a swig from the wine bottle, smacked his lips and passed the bottle around.

Don't sweat the small stuff!

When things in your life seem almost too much to handle, when twenty four hours in a day are not enough, remember Mahesh's jar and the two glasses of wine! Whatever your methods of stress management and relaxation, ensure you build in time for recreation. Hit golf balls. Collect pebbles. Walk along the sand. Socialize with friends. However you like to relax, make sure you do it. Never let a narrow work-focus obscure the bigger picture of a healthy, balanced life. Remember that stress management is entirely in your own hands. Smile, life really is too short to sweat the small stuff.

Finally, whenever you visualize yourself, see yourself as a majestic lion with a big fluffy mane confidently ambling down the pathways of life, empowered by the belief that you will never be stressed or worried because whatsoever life may throw your way, you are completely in control of how you will react to it.

People can be bound physically in chains anywhere except in their minds.

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6 Author Profile

Shiv Dhawan was born in Kolkata (India) on 25th November 1961. He completed his Baccalaureate (with Honors) – first class first from the prestigious St. Stephen's College, University of Delhi. Having secured a first class first again in his Master's programme he obtained his Ph.D. in socio-political philosophy from the University of Delhi in 1993. He has been a management consultant for last 25 years working in the sphere of organization and people transformation. He has also been a distinguished faculty for behavioral sciences in several well-known management and training institutes. Having worked out of India, China, Bhutan, Sultanate of Oman, Canada and the USA, he has been closed associated with people of different ethnicities and work styles. Having observed different work styles and the way different people from varied geographies react to adversity he has combined his empirical experience with his philosophical insights to evolve training and sensitization programmes for stress management. These have been targeted at shop floor as well as senior executives across a number of domains. In his own capacity Shiv has had a very colorful life where he has been surrounded and attacked by a pride of seven ferocious lions in a game reserve as part of his professional engagements and not lost his sangfroid or been stressed for a micro – millisecond. He has also been through a couple of crash landings, and lived through ethnic riots. Having recently lost a million rupees in business literally overnight he still managed to retain his sunny demeanor. He has dissected all his personal experiences to understand how he survived the stressful situations and many of the suggestions contained in the book have actually been tested on himself and his close acquaintances thus proving that if they can work for him and his close friends and clients they can work for anybody.

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Shiv currently lives in New Delhi with his mother Gajinder who is a reknown pranic healer, wife Sareena who is a school teacher and two children Madhav and Chandni. Besides writing, he loves collecting antique wrist watches, listening to ballroom dance and waltz music especially La Paloma and The Blue Danube and unwinding through swimming in his favorite weekend haunt of the Delhi Gymkhana Club. He can be contacted on shiv.dhawan1@gmail.com.

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7 Endnotes

1. *"The Social Readjustment Rating Scale", Thomas H. Holmes and Richard H. Rahe, Journal of Psychosomatic Research, Volume 11, Issue 2, August 1967, Pages 213–218, Copyright © 1967 Published by Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved. Permission to reproduce granted by the publisher*

2. *Adapted from scripts in www.innerhealthstudio.com*

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